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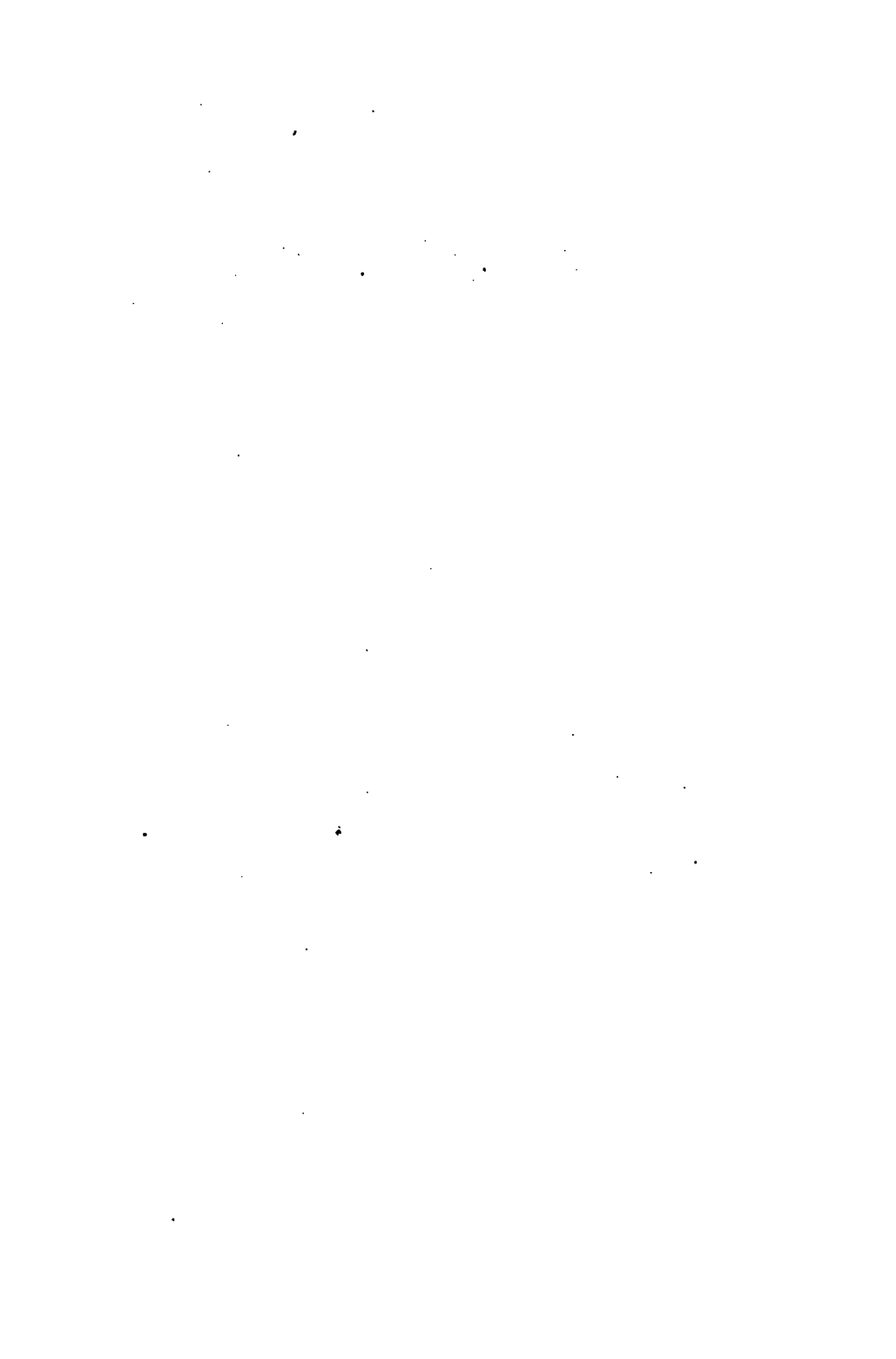




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# SPECULATION

A NOVEL

BY THE AUTHOR OF "TRAITS AND TRADITIONS OF  
PORTUGAL."

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOLUME I.

LONDON

SAUNDERS AND OTLEY, CONDUIT STREET.

1834.

254.



“ You have advanced a very slender argument, Frank;” replied a full, deep, luxurious voice:—a voice whose very tones implied that the speaker could not sympathize in any of the presentiments of poverty and embarrassment which, like the ghosts in Richard, were rising in grim array before the startled eye of his companion: “ the hind does not whistle at his plough now that ‘ the schoolmaster is abroad,’ and the operative only smiles at his club at the termination of one of his own harangues.—Come, fill your glass, and try that preserved ginger: it is good, I dare say, for the old fellow was no despicable judge of West Indian produce. And so you decline going down to Shropshire with me, eh? Why, you grow churlish as well as sententious, Frank. Come, come, were you old, ugly, and a bore, then, indeed, you might ‘ run a muck’ at hope; but yours is another affair altogether.”

“ Another affair! do you remember that I

have not a shilling in the world—that I am a gentleman beggar,—an educated pauper?”

“Then you must—marry;” was the grave reply.

“And, in the name of all that is obscure, who would marry me under such circumstances? or how am I, who cannot support myself, to provide for a wife?”

“She must provide for you;” and his companion was as serious as before. “The wine, Harcourt.” There was a long pause, which was ultimately broken by the same speaker murmuring to himself, “Eton,—Oxford,—two-and-twenty;—dark blue eyes,—six feet high,—fine shoulders,—well-turned leg,—bred to the law;”—here there was a marked emphasis. “Harcourt,” he added, in a higher key, addressing himself more directly to his astonished listener, “you will be cheap at thirty thousand.”

“Are you mad, Nichols?”

“No, my friend; but these things often make the ladies so. I know that at this mo-

ment you might have Arabella Goldsby on demand, and she will be grateful to you for the opportunity."

"Heavens,—she squints!"

"So do your fortunes; a man never refuses a few bank-notes because they chance to be soiled."

Harcourt sighed audibly.

"I did not think you were so young," pursued his friend; "matrimony, Frank, is the best speculation extant; ay, it beats the joint stock companies hollow; for you may embark in it with no other capital than good eyes, ready wit, and unabashable impudence. Did you never hear the anecdote of a certain gallant guardsman, who having resolved to recruit his expiring fortunes in this most orthodox manner, turned the light of his eyes and epaulettes on the well-dowried daughter of an opulent blacking merchant? No!—well, so it was; and when he flattered himself that he had succeeded to the undoubted prospect

of her smiles and sovereigns, he discovered that the lady was the affianced bride of a more fortunate man. Do you think he forswore regimentals, and took to rhyme? No, no, he did better; he looked about him again, and by way of encouragement, some of his brother officers adorned the door of the house in which he lodged with a well-chalked shred of advice, TRY WARREN'S!"

"I cannot make a trade of my affections," observed Harcourt.

"Nay, if you sport sentiment, I despair of you. Send me one of those pomegranates, pass the wine, and then listen, and learn wisdom. Lusignan Feathercourt was a neighbour of my father's; his worthy parent, Mr. Jeremy Feathercourt, gave him a fine education, four years on the continent, two hundred per annum to starve upon, and turned him adrift. Eustace, the elder brother, took the estate, and the old man divided the hard cash among the girls. '*Va t'en,*' said the

papa, and Lusignan walked off accordingly. He was a good-looking fellow, well built, and as elastic as Indian rubber;—a famous shot, a fine dancer, a capital flirt, waltzed deliciously, ejected small talk as though he had been born expressly for the purpose, and, above all, he never forgot that he must be the architect of his own fortunes. Well, to London he came; dressed high, though he could not pay his tailor; betted high, when any one would take his bet; lived high, until he became a walking ‘bad debt’ to every hotel-keeper about town; rode hard, when he borrowed a friend’s horse; stared hard, when he thought a girl’s complexion looked bilious from her father’s gold; and worked hard, at his toilette glass. In short, Feather-court was *en route* for a good thing if ever man was, when the blockhead fell in love—bona fide in love—full ten fathoms deep! He was making up to Miss Justina Grachet, the only daughter and heiress of old Bartholo-

new Grachet, a retired slop-seller, who had a snug fifty thousand in bank stock, and sundry little *et ceteras* elsewhere. The father, to be sure, shuffled, and screwed, and talked about his expectations, and such like irrationalities; but mademoiselle herself did 'seriously incline' to his addresses, and all went on as flourishingly as he could wish; truth to tell, the young lady had light grey eyes, and red hair, measured some yard and a quarter round the waist, and had encouraged her shoulders into a visiting acquaintance with her ears: stretched her father's shoes, and had never been able altogether to divide the interest of the *v*'s and *w*'s of her discourse; but these were 'trifles light as air' to one who had eyes, hair, shape, and expression for both; and he also wisely remembered, that although Miss Grachet might choose to talk, it would be very easy to make Mrs. Feathercourt hold her tongue; and that even if the spinster thought proper to sport red ringlets, the ma-



tron might be easily initiated into the propriety of having her head shaved, or wearing caps. It was a pity that such a sensible fellow should lose himself, but he did so nevertheless; went to Bath, saw Almeria Stanhope, a girl of high family, and high breeding, without a sous, and fell in love! Then he began to curse fortune, as all men do who have more sentiment than sense; played the guitar and the fool with the 'Stanhope,' and left the Grachet to pat the piano, and warble 'Vill you come to the bower,' by herself; then there were moonlight walks and tailors' bills; and serenades, and ice-creams; and new music, and new pastry: and heart-aches, and Atkinson's curling fluid;—but who does not know something of the agreeable mélange of a love affair! 'Still this might have been all very well: he liked it, and she liked him; but he wanted to marry her, and then came a statement of impossibilities: aristocratic letters from her aristocratic relations,

ingeniously folded in unfranked envelopes; deprecating epistles from his own father; more explanations, a series of hysterics, and a parting! Miss Stanhope went into a decline, and was hurried off to Lisbon, and Lusignan Feathercourt voted himself miserable; loitered about town another season, running new bills and new perils; distancing bailiffs, and coaxing Israelites; and it all ended at last by the death of old Grachet, an accomodement between his fair daughter and the love-sick Lusignan; and the arrival of the bridal party at the white-washed villa facing the north gate of my park."

"What a miserable match!" ejaculated Harcourt.

"And wherefore?" demanded his friend. "Feathercourt remained three weeks with his wife, got up a quarrel, and left her; the result of nineteen out of twenty marriages in the nineteenth century. So, once more, *nil desperandum*, say I!"

"It is a vile resource!" again exclaimed the listener; "with you, as a mere theory, its whimsicality diminishes its disgust; but where it must be reduced to practice,—then"——

"Well! what then?"

"Then the very idea becomes loathsome! to sacrifice all the finer feelings of one's nature"——

"Psha! no rhapsodies;—pass the bottle, and take a long look at the mirror in front of you. Well, what see you there? anything to induce despair? anything to put favour and fortune beyond your grasp?"

Harcourt involuntarily smiled. His fine eyes lighted up, and he spoke less despondingly. "You, Nichols, advise coolly enough, but remember that nothing costs less than advice, and few things require more effort than to be guided by it. Think you that I am cynic enough, even casting aside all my feelings of aversion to the step itself which you counsel, to mingle among the bright and the

beautiful, and to experience no longing to possess myself of one of the fair creatures who make existence so glorious? Think you that"——

"Now, by all that is wonderful, Frank, you will bewilder me; have you not got to grapple with fortune? is not the world before you, a blank waste on which you are free to trace what outline you please, always remembering that it will shadow forth your future fate, and must be filled up in after-years? Do you not now confront me, a handsome youth, (man, if you will,) of twenty-three or four, with a face to attract a lady's eye, and a figure to enchain it? Are you not well-born, well-mannered, and well-looking? Were you not bred to the bar? the glorious bar, where a man may live for the first six years on the red tape which is intended to secure his maiden brief, and then make a bad speech in support of a bad cause, and get at once into discredit with the bench, and

into disgrace with his client? Are you fit for aught else on earth? Could you endure the country quarters and coxcombical younger sons, which are now the prominent features of military existence? Could you mount the mast-head at midnight, in storm and tempest, till 'your very mother would not know her son,' and after years of servility and suffering at sea, die at last an Admiralty midshipman, with the pleasing consciousness of having 'passed' some ten or twelve years before for your lieutenancy, and having only failed to obtain it from the 'untoward' circumstance of possessing no titled connexions to certify your eligibility for promotion? for this you must most assuredly expect to do, if you try the navy. Could you study for the church, and waste your days in a remote village, preaching to ploughmen and dairymaids? Or try physic, and only look upon the beauty on which you so love to dilate, amid disease and death? Think



of all these things; we will set aside the years of sickening study which such pursuits would demand, we will look only to the pursuits themselves; the prostration of soul, the exertion of body which they require, the utter uncertainty of their ultimate success, the withering thirst for patronage, which alone can tend to make them profitable, we will not say pleasurable,—and then, turn to *my* alternative: your only study will be to look well; your only vigil at the Opera, or in the drawing-room; your only obedience to comply with the behests of beauty; your only exertion in her behalf; there will be no heart-sinking at the dread of failure, where success is certain; if you are frowned upon to-day, you are tolerably sure of being smiled upon to-morrow; you will be talked to, talked of, and talked for."

"Nichols, Nichols, you intoxicate me; if you harangue thus, I shall ere long be yours, heart and soul."

“Ay! now I know you, Frank; think too of your hunters and your hounds, for you must not lose your liberty lightly; your house in town, and your place in the country; what, though your wife may be plain, you can fill your drawing-rooms with some of those ‘bright creations’ of which you were speaking a few minutes ago; all may go ‘merry as a marriage-bell’ with you; look and listen where bright eyes and soft voices are the lures; and play propriety and prudence in your chaise longue when you have an hour to spare to the lady who heads your table—at home.”

“Yet, what a void of soul”——

“A void of fiddlesticks! Are not your pockets void? are not your prospects void? is not the world a void to you just now, and likely to continue so, if you do not put your hand to the oar?”

“I confess it all; yet to overthrow at once the fairy visions of one’s imagination—to

awaken so utterly from the dreams of one's youth,—the delusions of one's delighted fancy"——

"Ay, from the dunning of one's importunate tailor; from the urgency of one's vociferous landlady; the upbraiding of one's uncompromising laundress;"——

"Never to look on your wedded wife, but with regret that she is not beautiful as well as rich; nor to cross your own threshold, save with the hope of finding its mistress absent:"——

"Never to dine fully but on the fresh breezes in Kensington Gardens, nor to cross the water, save in the neighbourhood of the Borough."

"You are sadly deficient in sentiment, Nichols."

"And you in sense, Frank; however, you have given some few glimpses of rationality since I started the subject of this matrimonial speculation, and I have hopes of you."



And so they parted. The one to laugh at the scruples of his penniless and sentimental associate ; the other to loathe himself when his thoughts suggested that those scruples might indeed one day be overcome. It is a humiliating truth, that evil, under whatever guile, becomes less hideous when we have accustomed ourselves to look upon it ; at the first glance, we start back appalled at the unholy apparition : we hate it equally for itself, and for the effect which it produces on our own hearts : well is it for us if we look not again ; if we turn back upon the path by which we came, and avoid all further contact ; at the second glance, if we are daring enough to meet the trial, we shudder and sicken, but we experience less loathing than before. Imperceptibly our eye becomes accustomed to the phantom before which we once quailed, and at length, in the empty pride of our own self-created security, we dally with the gems and flowers which are wreathed about the loath-

some shape, even though we know that they have become poisonous by the contact. Frank Harcourt was even now venturing on a second glance; he was sickening at the conviction that all the fine feelings which had hitherto, even amid the dreariness of his prospects, afforded balm to his proud spirit, must be overcome and annihilated; that his "fairy visions," as he somewhat romantically designated the thousand bright fancies of his youth, must be dispelled for ever: and that he must adopt a new system of thinking and acting, very, very widely opposed in many particulars to that on which he had hitherto prided himself. On the other hand, he could not help suggesting to his own heart, that with his talents, and his figure (!) he was not, could not be born to suffer poverty, deprivation, and the world's neglect. Nichols had drawn no very inviting picture of the several professions which he had passed in review; and moreover, he had followed up his jaundiced and discouraging

comments on these, by such gay, though vague visions of rooms crowded with light and beauty, of affluence and independence, that his brain was dazzled. Harcourt began to understand the value of his personal appearance; and the morning succeeding the tête-à-tête dinner in Nichols' luxurious lodgings in Regent Street, his first visit was to his tailor. Even the professional compliments, or rather flatteries of the man of measures, though he could not but suspect that they were circulars, intended to go the whole round of his employers, gave an inward satisfaction to the young barrister, for which he would have scorned himself only two days before. Now, however, he listened with complacency to laboured eulogiums on his fine shoulders and slender waist; and turned from the door with a higher opinion of the *artiste*, who was entrusted with the decoration of his outward man, than he had ever previously entertained. Harcourt possessed a very ample stock of sensibility,

and that scarcely defined quality so often called "honorable feeling;" but his was honorable feeling, according to the mere worldly acceptance of the term; that is to say, he would not have suffered a man to call him a liar, or a poltroon; no! he would have panted day and night with impatience until the stain was obliterated which had thus been cast upon his character; but, at the same time, he would not have hesitated to send the perpetrator of the offence to a premature grave with his own hand, though, by the act, he might leave a widow and her fatherless children to struggle with anguish and destitution; he would have visited with instant vengeance the daring tongue which had breathed the lightest syllable reflecting on his mother, or his sister, had he possessed such relatives; but in his own person, he suffered not the pangs which he inflicted on others to interfere with, or cripple his own pleasures. He paid his debts of honor scrupulously, and unflinchingly; but many a

tradesman's book had an ample page headed by the name of Frank Harcourt, Esquire, and containing specimens of caligraphy and arithmetic, infinitely more pleasing to the writer than to the reader. Harcourt sported a cab, and kept as high-bred a horse as any to be seen in town; but the cab was not paid for, and the horse was fairly in pawn to a fashionable livery stable keeper, not a hundred miles from Regent Street. Nevertheless, who will doubt that Mr. Harcourt was an honorable man? He had not an associate but would have sworn to it!

Joseph Nichols Esquire, nephew and heir to the wealthy Mr. Roberts, whose property had been computed at more than half a million, was a man of another stamp. Conscious of the power, the talismanic, *open Sesame*, power of money, he threw himself listlessly on the sofa when Harcourt quitted him, with a brain teeming with visions as ambitious and absorbing as those with which he had furnished the

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spirit of the young barrister. "Did he aspire to the dignity of the mayoralty?" asks a rising citizen: No, sir; Joseph Nichols could ride in as fine a coach, and give as fine a dinner as the Lord Mayor himself, without having to attend police offices, and to present addresses: besides, he had too much city dust on his feet as it was; to be sure, it was gold dust, but—let that pass; no visions of the civic sovereignty were floating in state barges over seas of turtle-soup, between rocks of venison and moorfowl, beneath a sky of cream ice, on the half-dreaming fancy of the wealthy Mr. Nichols. "Did he aspire to the peerage?" lisps the younger son of a noble family; the thing is possible: he would have done no dishonor to the upper house, if it were so; but there was a shade of softness stealing at intervals across the brow of the day-dreamer which seemed to imply that ambition alone did not occupy his mental vision. "Perhaps," would Mr. — smile in his blandest manner, if he were at my



elbow, "the gentleman is thinking of building a palace on his estate, to rival the one at Pimlico, and to overwhelm the memory of Font-hill Abbey, if so, sir,"—— "Well, sir," should I reply "and if so"—— "Then you would probably be polite enough to remind him of my popularity." This, with a tone and look as smooth as that of the "popular" architect himself, I should declare to be wholly unnecessary; for who that has a building mania would hesitate to employ a gentleman who, like a child with cards, has discovered and imparted the excitement of rebuilding every part of the fabric which falls in the process, with economy and dispatch? A blue-eyed peri beside me has ventured another guess. Mr. Nichols was perhaps musing on matrimony! no improbable suggestion: and I will even admit the fact—it was so; and there could be no doubt, there *was* no doubt on the minds of either the dowagers or daughters in Mr. Nichols' somewhat limited circle of acquaint-

ance, that the said Mr. Nichols was an unexceptionable speculation. If not decidedly handsome, he was well-looking, and the heir of an old uncle, who had bequeathed to him above half-a-million; his principles were beyond all praise, for he had three splendid estates; his connexions everything that could be wished, for they were all people whom he could "cut" if he pleased, while he had above half-a-million of money; his temper serene and equal, for he had more than thirty thousand a-year! There was a receipt from Howell and James in every one of his smiles, and an Opera-box in his side-curl!



## CHAPTER II.

ON what apparent trifles are hinged the destinies of man: I have heard of a wealthy merchant, the foundation of whose fortunes was laid by a guinea which he picked up on the pavement of Cheapside; he was penniless when it caught his eye, he took it as an immediate gift of Providence, and used it accordingly; and he is now, or once was, an alderman of the City of London, and an individual of substance and consideration.

As Harcourt was slowly riding through the Park, about a week after the conversation recorded in the last chapter, he heard himself addressed by name, in a shrill, sharp

voice, perfectly familiar to him, and as he drew in his bridle-rein, the speaker stood at his stirrup. He was a short man, of some fifty and five years, with a small, shrewd, grey eye, which never rested for two seconds at a time on the same object; a bald head, thickly and carefully powdered, and an extremely well-fitted pair of gloves; his entire costume was black, arranged with considerable attention to becomingness, and scrupulously free from soil or stain; even the very dust appeared to have respected him, for not a single speck marred the glories of his well-varnished boots; while the wind, with equal courtesy, had left his smoothly-brushed beaver with almost as unexceptionable a surface as when he put it on at his own door.

"Ha! Mr. Maxim," said Harcourt, as he extended his hand; "this fine day has even tempted you into the Park:—is there any news in your part of the town?"

"Sad! sad!" said the gentleman in black,

with a slight, a very slight shake of the head, not decided enough to agitate a hair of his powdered whiskers; "but if people will not exert themselves for the best, they must prepare for the worst—that's my maxim: though I do not approve of your applying a *soubriquet* to me so unceremoniously, young gentleman; as I often say, the follies of age should be no mark for the shafts of youth: and a very good maxim it is."

"Follies, Mr. Marsden!" said Harcourt, gaily; "come, come, you are modest; Rochefaucault was no weak model, and Rousseau and Voltaire were tolerably able professors."

"Ha! young man, a rising lawyer is a subtle casuist;—but my news"—

"Ay;—the report, the report."

"A friend of mine, a female friend, Mr. Harcourt,—'make but one friend if you do not wish to lose all,' is a maxim with many people, but I call it a poor, narrow-minded, groveling sort of creed, young gentleman:

‘make friends, enemies will make themselves,’ say I—well, this identical friend, a wealthy widow,”——

“A wealthy widow!” gasped Harcourt; and the tête-à-tête dinner with Nichols, the conversation, the vague thoughts to which that conversation had given birth, all rushed, like long-pent-up water, in a flood over his brain.

“Yes, a wealthy widow; mistress of six or seven thousand a-year; she has met with some vexatious circumstances lately—money matters, mixed up with a little law: a bad ingredient—no offence to you, young gentleman; but, ‘if a man rob you of ten pounds, give him five more to keep your secret, that you may not be obliged to disburse twenty to your lawyer to get back the first ten for you;’—that’s my maxim.”

“A safe one certainly, Mr. Marsden; but what of your friend the widow?”

“Why, she is not of my way of thinking, wherein she is greatly to blame, but that

is her own affair; and she has entrusted me to get her advice on the business, as she will not believe that 'if you have lost a sovereign, throwing away a five-pound note out of the window to go and bring it back, is not the way to make yourself richer;' though, as regards law, I cannot help thinking, that although the maxim be somewhat figurative, it is, nevertheless, a very sound one."

We are not going to enter into the detail of the widow's projected law-suit, we would as soon undertake the knitting of a silk purse, or the threading of a bead bracelet, or any other of those laboriously-elaborate, and tediously-useless occupations, wherein some of our fair countrywomen spend so much money, employ so much time, and exert so much patience, in order to supersede by their own individual ingenuity the honest and anxious industry of a crowd of hard-working unfortunates, whose subsistence depends on their solitary and often unsolaced efforts; and to

shew the possibility of making the pretty, and frequently imperfect, gewgaw, cost a larger sum than would have been demanded for it by the legitimate manufacturers. Let it suffice, that the subject became, in its manifold ramifications, so interesting to the young barrister, that he ultimately sprang from his horse, threw the bridle to his groom, and, with the neatly-gloved hand of Mr. Marsden resting on his arm, soon became absorbed in as deep and confidential a tête-à-tête as any over which the trees in the Park ever cast their shadow.

Reader, did you ever chance to hear sundry particulars of a person or a place which you had never seen, and forthwith let your imagination play the wanton with you, and shape a thousand fantastic fancies on the subject of such place or person? If you have done so,—and who has not?—you will understand how, from all he had heard, and all he conjectured, and all he inferred, Frank

Harcourt had decided in his own mind, that the rich widow, Mr. Marsden's friend, and the mistress of a very desirable villa at Twickenham, and a very comfortable house in Baker-street, was as beautiful as she was wealthy, long before he reached home; if she were beautiful, it followed that she must be agreeable, as a thing of course; if her rent-roll was large, her temper must be unexceptionable, for what could she have to ruffle it withal! and—this was the climax! if she was beautiful, rich, agreeable, and well-tempered, could a more eligible wife be found in all London for Frank Harcourt, Esq., Barrister at Law? Certainly not. And consequently the young gentleman sat down to a solitary and somewhat scanty dinner, with a perfect conviction that the charming widow was to be his Cheapside guinea!

He was the more easily induced to this belief, by the simple fact, that he had won



upon the open-hearted and guileless Mr. Marsden by his extreme attention to the tedious and tautological particulars of the affair, with which that worthy person had been pleased to favour him, to believe that his individual advice on the case was precisely that which, in all London, would be the most serviceable to the lady; and from the knowledge which he had skilfully and carelessly obtained in the course of their memorable dialogue, that the deceased husband of the law-loving widow had been stern in manner, unprepossessing in appearance, and cold in his affections; in fine, that the gentle mourner had been dazzled by the advantages of his great wealth, which, at the period of their marriage, was daily increasing, through the well-judged and adventurous speculations of her suitor.

In a day or two after this rencontre, Frank Harcourt received, as he sat at breakfast, the following note :



“ Dear Sir,

“ I am authorized by my friend Mrs. Wilkins, to place the very unpleasant affair, which I mentioned to you a day or two since in the Park, entirely in your hands: the necessary papers will be delivered whenever or wherever you may please to appoint, though, with regard to time, I may venture to remind you, that if a man wants to indulge in a sunny walk, he must not defer leaving home until twilight; you are shrewd, and were bred to the law, consequently you will see the inference,—the maxim may be trite, but it is nevertheless true.

“ I remain, Dear Sir, Your’s,

“ Marmaduke Marsden.”

“ F. Harcourt, Esq.”

“ Mrs. Wilkins,” uttered Harcourt, half aloud, with a slight curl of the upper lip “ the name is plebeian enough; Harcourt sounds infinitely better;—she will have the good taste to

see this: no wonder that the divine widow felt no affection for—*ugly Mr. Wilkins!*" The whole train of Harcourt's thoughts was changed at once: "My fortune, perhaps my existence, depends on this one law business:" was the first reflection which he made as he refolded the epistle of Mr. Marsden, written on satin paper, and sealed with a most formidable coat-of-arms: involuntarily he read the motto, "I think twice;" he thought of the owner's maxims, and smiled. "It is a pretty note, of right pleasant import:" mused the hitherto briefless barrister; "the widow's cause could not be in better hands, her interest is—must be—mine!—sweet Mrs. Wilkins! pshaw!—the adjective is inapplicable with such a name, the euphony is frightful! she must rid herself of such an anti-aristocratic designation." And then Harcourt re-read the note, and thought twice, as Marsden's motto warned him to do, of the business on which it treated. To his experienced eye it afforded

few intricacies : the result caused him no anxiety ; and in half an hour he was nodding in his chair, musing on the house in Baker Street, the Twickenham villa, and the seven thousand a-year ; ambition dwelt complacently for awhile on these pleasing particulars, and then the early, and still only half-annihilated romance of his nature, came in their suite ; he was convinced that the widow, (he would not say *Mrs. Wilkins* even to himself) was small and slight ; (he was an admirer of small women ;) with blue eyes, golden hair, a voice like music, and a foot which would do no disgrace to a fairy. Harcourt's earliest heart-dream had presented just such a portrait ; and he yet remembered the spell of the young beauty's eye who first enthralled him, and taught him that Lyttleton must yield to love : and that a moonlight whisper out-valued all the dull communion of the long, dreary day. How exquisite was the reflection that his beautiful incognita had not *loved* her deceased lord ;

how delightful the knowledge that the defunct Mr. Wilkins had been ill-looking, ill-tempered, and, as a matter of course, ill-bred; it must have been an illustration of Beauty and the Beast! All this was very consolatory, and highly encouraging; Harcourt glanced at the mirror, and ran his fingers through the thick clusters of his fine hair; *he* was the antipodes of Mr. Wilkins. The villa at Twickenham must be settled on the fair widow: Harcourt was not partial to Twickenham; he had visions of the New Forest, a yacht, a Manton, and a trout stream. He detested every thing which savoured of Cockneyism; (Frank was born in St. Paul's Church-yard!) in fact, before he sauntered forth to sun himself in Pall Mall, he was getting vastly difficult in his ideas. One of Harcourt's few high-born acquaintance was Lady Clara Ashburnham, the youngest, and sole unmarried daughter of the Earl of Somerville; her ladyship was not a beauty, nor a blue; a wit, nor a sentimentalist; she was sim-

ply that very matter-of-fact character, an establishment-hunter. There were hints that her temper was in a slight degree irascible, but we have high authority for believing that there are instances where:—

“ The short passing anger but serves to awaken  
New beauties, like flowers which are sweetest when  
shaken.”

On this principle Lady Clara perhaps acted; but was she not the daughter of an Earl? and must not proud blood assert itself? Who will venture to deny, or to question its prerogative? Lady Clara was, besides, one of the most bland of unmarried ladies in society, and her flashes of vivacity, were, it might be, merely intended to prevent stagnation in the family circle. Certain it was, that be all this as it might, she had lost as much of her heart to Frank Harcourt, as it was prudent or pleasant to bestow on a person whom nobody knew; she had honoured him with her sweetest smiles, (in the hope that he possessed wherewith-all

to *make* a name,) during the whole evening of his introduction; and even since the woful discovery had been made by her watchful connexions that he literally was nobody, and had not one prospect of becoming anybody, she had retained so delightful a reminiscence of his rich, deep voice, and his large love-beaming eye, that she had never passed him without an inclination of her plumed head, and a smile from her aristocratic lips. If Lady Clara could have found room for another feeling within her contracted heart, besides that of ambition which rankled there, she would decidedly have loved Frank Harcourt. As it was she remembered that her high birth must buy a good settlement; that she must barter her proud blood for gold, and she smiled at her own romance, after she had passed him, a more decided smile than she had bestowed upon himself.

“There is a tide in the affairs of men,” as the poet sings, or did sing; and Harcourt felt



that it was so, as with the letter of the fair widow's confidential friend in his waistcoat pocket, he trod the earth, (or rather the *trottoir*) with an elastic step ; and amused himself by criticising the various equipages which rolled past him, busy on a thousand errands of laborious idleness. At the door of that high priestess of the graces Maradan, stood the britscha of Lady Clara Ashburnham ; and as Harcourt lounged towards it, the fair owner herself came forth from the temple, on whose altar she had probably offered up, or wished to offer up, the scattered coins which alone could propitiate the divinity. Harcourt sprang forward, and begged in his best manner to be permitted the honor of handing Lady Clara to her carriage ; the suit was granted ; and when the smiling and somewhat fluttered fair one had sunk amid the soft and luxurious cushions of her fairy vehicle, the young plebeian, who was not slow to perceive the effect which his apparition had produced, leant languidly, and,

as it seemed, admiringly, against the closed door, and breathed a thousand anxious enquiries about a thousand things in which he felt not the slightest interest; Lady Clara bowed, and blushed, and smiled; and thought of wishing him good morning, and then deferred it for five minutes longer. Harcourt profited by the opportunity thus afforded to him, and looked, and sighed until the lady was satisfied of her conquest, and had time to remark how little the daylight, the odious, tale-telling, open-eyed daylight, diminished the attractions of the handsome Mr. Harcourt. He was lively, and even witty; for he thought of Baker Street and the rich widow; and resolved that if by his own exertions he could accomplish so desirable an object, Mrs. Harcourt should be on Lord Somerville's visiting list. Poor Lady Clara! little did she suspect that day, when the bright-eyed young barrister bowed upon her hand, and looked into her eyes on parting, that he had never remarked

on the extreme becomingness of her Parisian bonnet, or the charming effect of her pelisse ; but, that, like her, he was amusing himself in one of the intervals of a fortune-hunting and manœuvring existence.

## CHAPTER III.

THE widow's cause was won! Mr. Harcourt had done wonders; at least so said Mr. Marsden, and so thought the bereaved Mrs. Wilkins: and even the young barrister was inclined to be somewhat of the same opinion when he received a well-folded envelope, enclosing a bank-bill for five hundred pounds, and an invitation to dinner. At first, Harcourt could scarcely believe his eyes; the point gained was so very a trifle, so almost unworthy of contention; he forgot for a time that there is such a weakness in the world as ostentation; a much more luminous idea struck him; he understood the thing at once: his friend Marsden

(Marmaduke Maxim had been his butt hitherto!) his friend Marsden had described him to the lovely widow, she had become interested, perhaps more than interested, by the portrait he had drawn; or, still more probable, she had herself actually seen him! *Him*; Frank Harcourt, Barrister at Law, and bachelor; there were so many opportunities for her to see him, the thing was certain; she *had* seen him, she was enamoured of him, she was sighing in solitude for the delicious Wednesday, when, at half-past seven (as the card informed him), he was to see the lions fed in Baker Street, and to share in their repast. Harcourt remembered the flutterings and flushings of Lady Clara, and really felt sorry for the widow!

Let no one carelessly decide that so great a change in so short a period in the nature of Harcourt, was either unnatural or improbable. He was poor, fastidious in his tastes, and vain. Had he at once decided on a plan of action, without reference to his peculiar feel-

ings, looking only to an ultimate good, without cavilling at the pleasantness of the path which led to it, he had sufficient energy of nature to have overcome a host of impediments; but now vanity, and that inherent love of all which was refined, and luxurious, had paralyzed the sterner and more manly impulses of honest and uncompromising resolution. Harcourt was a Sybarite in soul; and when once the bed of roses had been spread for him, even in idea, he shrank with loathing from the more healthy and independent rest, which his own hands might have insured to him. "Why," he asked himself, for he became logical in his solitude, "why should I be an outcast from fortune, when she has rained her favours, like a manna-shower, on Joseph Nichols? Am I not as worthy of them as he? am I not as highly educated, as finely constituted, as —, likely to *charm* the goddess into smiles? *ergo*, Frank Harcourt, thou shalt not toil to gain an unsatisfactory competence, a starveling sufficiency,



a mere comfortable independence,—that undefined and undefinable something which every man rates according to his own estimate:—no! thou shalt take Lady Fortune by storm; thou shalt win her by the most delicious of all methods—by smiles, and glances, and gentle tones! the key-stone of thy prosperity shall be lovely woman, and its foundation as glowing a specimen of la belle passion, as ever made captive the heart of a young beauty!”

Frank’s reverie was becoming quite pleasant and poetical; and ever and anon he extended his leg, and looked complacently on a foot which certainly did no discredit to the goodly specimen of Hoby’s very perfect performance in which it was enclosed. It would have been *grossier à vingt quatre carats* to have premeditatedly interrupted such a delicious, anti-mundane fit of enjoyment as that in which the young barrister was now absorbed; and, doubtless, if the comely and elaborately-attired Mrs. Fisher, his very respectable landlady, had sus-

pected for a moment that he was so pleasingly engaged, she would have forborne her visit; however, she, good woman, could not possibly have an idea, judging from the import of a very long, narrow, closely-inscribed manuscript which she held in her hand, that Frank Harcourt, Esq. at the very moment when she applied her fair fingers to the brass nob of his door, to effect an entrance into the smartly curtained and carpeted room, which he had within the last hour been industriously converting into, what some imaginative print-sellers in our sentimental metropolis have lately designated their shops,—“a Temple of Fancy;” she, I repeat, poor woman, could not possibly suspect that he was at that identical moment standing on the lowest step of a certain edifice near Hanover Square, handing a lovely woman, all blonde and orange-blossom, into a superb travelling chariot, drawn by four high-bred bays. So it was, however; and he started, “more in sorrow than in anger,” when, with-

out even the courtesy of a preliminary signal, the portly Mrs. Fisher crossed the threshold of his apartment, and stood before him. Harcourt saw, at a glance, that what his fair visitor held in her hand was not a white glove; but he remembered the widow's bank-bill, and turned towards her with one of those smiles, which, as Mrs. Fisher was wont to acknowledge to her particular friends, "always conjured her heart into her mouth, as long as his account was under twenty pounds."

"Ha, my pretty landlady;" said Frank, in a tone of light-hearted gallantry, "and how are you, Mrs. Fisher? though it is a very useless question when I look at your eyes; take a seat, my good hostess; nay, nay, no ceremony; pray be seated."

"Pretty or ugly, Mr. Harcourt," replied his creditor; striving, despite his handsome face, and his very polite attention, to preserve her look and attitude of dignity and decision, "pretty or ugly, sir, sitting or standing, I am

come to say, that you really must pay your bill, or leave my first floor."

"But I am attached to your first floor, Mrs. Fisher."

"I don't doubt that, sir;" and the owner of the chintz curtains and Brussels carpet looked complacently round the apartment; "but I am a lone widow, sir, and I depend on my lodgers."

Harcourt smiled again; she was not *his* widow!

"I am really sorry to trouble you, sir;" continued Mrs. Fisher, as she looked up, and encountered the smile, which she, with all a woman's ingenuity, immediately misconstrued. Harcourt did not instantly reply, for a new fold of the cloud of imagination in which he was enwrapped when the lady broke in upon his solitude, was just floating past his "mind's eye." Mrs. Fisher made no remark on his uncourteous silence; for I know not whether castle-building be contagious, but the worthy

widow was in an instant busily employed with a Chateau en Espagne of her own. Her dark eyes ran up and down, and in and out, following all the little intricacies of the pattern of her best Brussels, but her mind went not with them: she was thinking that it was ten thousand pities that so young, nice, genteel, and handsome a young gentleman should be poor, and not marry, or take some means of making money! Little did Mr. Frank Harcourt suspect, when in his turn he aroused his landlady from a reverie, which, from some unaccountable cause, had considerably heightened her complexion, that he was at the moment an object of her pity, and that she had decided in her own mind that he was "a very nice, genteel young gentleman!" Nice! and genteel!! Had he suspected the application of two such adjectives to himself, he would never have recovered the shock; "And so, Mrs. Fisher, you are quite determined that I shall pay my bill, or vacate the premises?"

"Why, not exactly that, sir;" said the widow, who, during the five minutes of silence in which she had just indulged, had, 'at all events,' and 'let things turn out as they might,' resolved 'not to be hard upon the poor young gentleman;' "but if you really cannot settle your account, I must request that you will move up to the next floor: the room is quite as comfortable as this, except, to be sure, that one of the windows is built up to save taxes, and that the curtains are white dimity, and the carpet only a Kidderminster."

"And now tell me, Mrs. Fisher;" said Frank, in his most silvery tone, and with one of his sweetest smiles, "could you really find it in your heart to send me, who have lodged with you so long, into an apartment up two pairs of stairs, as dark as a dungeon, hung with white dimity, and carpetted with Kidderminster?"—He could have laughed outright as he asked the question, but he refrained.

"To be sure, Mr. Harcourt, you have



lodged with me a long time;" said the widow, vacillating between avarice and admiration: "but then you know, sir, you have never paid for your apartments,—and if you think that another week or two"—She paused for a moment, and Harcourt waited silently to hear the termination of her harangue; she fidgetted on her chair, looked for a moment on a fine engraving of Lord Brougham in an oak frame, with which the young barrister had decorated his mantel, and at length proceeded sotto voce: "It's a sad pity, sir, that so well-looking a young gentleman as you are, should ever be obliged to put up with a second floor; and, it seems to me, that it might be so easily prevented." Here she made a full stop.

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that law is much the same as physic, Mr. Harcourt: nobody will have anything to do with it unless they're obliged."

"You are mistaken, my good lady:" said Frank; he was thinking of the widow in Baker Street.

"I may be, sir, to be sure; but really you must allow that, even in your own case, it looks very much like it."

"And the remedy, my kind counsellor?" urged the lodger.

"Matrimony; sir," said the widow, with a blush, which mounted to her very hair-roots; "you young gentlemen may laugh at such fancies in a woman, but I say, marry; it will be hard indeed if your handsome face won't get you a wife, ay, and something to make the pot boil too. Now suppose for instance, sir," continued Mrs. Fisher, more unconstrainedly, encouraged by the unequivocal look of satisfaction and self-gratification which met her own—"suppose, sir, for instance, you were to make

up to some respectable widow, well to do in the world, wouldn't a wife be better than a dun? and even if you thought proper to follow up your law, and run your chance of being one day Lord Chancellor, as, to be sure, you've a right to do if you please, and as no reasonable woman would wish to hinder you from doing, don't you think it would be a more comfortable thing to have a house of your own, and a responsible person to take care of it for you, and to make the most of everything, than to be living as you are now in a lodging, paying a high rent, just for the sake of keeping up appearances?"

"My dear Mrs. Fisher," said Frank, with the utmost gravity, "I have been for the last week thinking the same thing: I shall take to-day to decide; that is, I shall take the remainder of the morning, for I dine out."

"Dear me, do you indeed!" exclaimed Mrs. Fisher, all the housewife roused within her at the intelligence; "then I hope, sir, you'll come

home time enough to pick a bit of supper, for I'm sure the rest of that mutton, that was baked last"——

"Never mind the mutton, my good lady;" interposed Frank in his turn, terrified at the idea of hearing of a joint which he was so tired of seeing; "I shall probably not dine at home again for several days. And now be kind enough to let me know the sum total of the little account which you hold in your hand, as I am going to the banker's in half-an-hour, and shall be happy to discharge it."

Mrs. Fisher rose with a smile and a sigh; Harcourt had so often told her that he was going to the banker's! and after laying two sheets of foolscap, cut up into strips, on the table before him, courtesied herself out of the drawing-room on her first floor.

## CHAPTER IV.

WE must now introduce to our readers the inhabitant of two small, meanly-furnished, and gloomy rooms, on the second floor of an obscure house in the neighbourhood of St. Martin's Lane. He was a young man of about the same age as Frank Harcourt; but eminently his superior, both in appearance and moral worth. Mortimer Eustace was an orphan: he had no relative on earth save one old lady, who was his third cousin; she was wealthy, and possessed the ability to place the means of honest independence within his reach; but she had lived so long for herself, that she had no feeling for others, when their

welfare did not contribute to, or enhance her own. A great portion of her property was entailed, but even here Fortune had been his foe, for she had a nephew, the son of her husband's sister, who was as young, and infinitely more robust than Mortimer himself; who, knowing that his father, the curate of a retired village in Westmoreland, could bequeath to him no legacy save a good education, had early enfeebled his body by ardent and unremitting application. Day and night, when the boy became of an age to comprehend the value of his father's lessons, did he study to emulate his knowledge; and when, in losing this revered father, he became an orphan, he had not a friend on earth. Twice had the elder Eustace, rendered humble by the desolate prospects of his noble-hearted boy, made an appeal to his wealthy relative, which he in his own simplicity of heart considered it impossible that she should resist; but the first obtained no answer, and the second merely a cold as-



surance of her determination never to suffer the name of Eustace to be mentioned in her presence; as she considered that an alliance with poverty was sufficiently degrading, without the annoyance of being incessantly reminded of the circumstance.

Like many older and more fortunate individuals, Mortimer Eustace believed London to be the very mart for learning in all its varieties; and not only the spot on earth where talent was the most respected, but where it was also the most certain of winning its way to fame and honour. He sold the few trifling articles of value which remained to him, when he had followed his father to the grave; and putting the pocket-bible of the pious divine into his little portmanteau, together with his scanty wardrobe, he bade adieu for ever to his natal village, accompanied by the tears and blessings of the humble beings who had nothing else to offer. And surely the tears and the blessings of the lowly and innocent

fall not wholly valueless on the parched and withered heart: like rain from heaven in a land perishing from drought, they refresh and gladden where they descend. Eustace felt that it was so; for as he turned from the village, and pursued the path across the meadows which led to the high London road, he felt his heart lightened of half its weight. It was a bright summer day, the hedge-roses and woodbine were casting their soft perfume upon the breeze; the bees were busy among the wild thyme, robbing it of its honey-dew; and the painted butterflies, like floating tulips, were idling among the flowers, themselves as gay and as glowing as the blossoms amid which they sported. A fine belt of timber encircled the grounds of the Lord of the Manor, whom Mortimer Eustace had, in his years of boyhood, been accustomed to consider as second only to the king himself, and to fear accordingly; now, he paused for a moment, and looked sadly on the majestic oaks

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said to me the night you arrived; 'father,' says she, 'as sure as anything our new lodger has eloped from his friends.' Now, young man, I am a father myself, (and though I say it, there isn't a nicer girl in the lane than my Clarissa) and if you really haven't got money enough about you to pay for your lodgings, and any little articles that you may want out of the shop, why, I for one, advise you to get outside the coach, and go home again to your friends; for you know the old saying, that 'fat sorrow's better than lean.'"

"I have no home;—I have no friends;" gasped out Mortimer, whom this coarse but natural advice had smitten to the very soul.

"W-h-e-w!" whistled Mr. Jobson, cramming his hands into his trouser-pockets, and rattling the loose coins which they contained; "that's a badish kind of a business, young man; however, you owe me nothing, so I've no right to say that it has a queerish look with it: I hurts no man's feelings that's out of my

debt; only there are folks that won't be so considerate as to stand on such ceremony here in London; and what do you mean to do?"

"It was to ask your advice that I desired to see you," said Eustace.

"Well, to be sure, advice costs nothing," smiled Mr. Jobson, crossing his right leg over his left; and after drawing his hands from their ambuscade, folding them consequentially above his knee; "and it's oftener offered than asked for; well, then, I should advise you to look about you for something to do."

"That is precisely what I have resolved upon: but except yourself, I do not know a soul in London."

"Oh! I am your only acquaintance! well then, it shall never be said that Jacob Jobson of St. Martin's Lane forsook a friend in distress: so I'll trust you for your lodgings another week, while you look out; only you mustn't have nothing out of the shop."

Mortimer felt crushed!—he even thanked

the man for his forbearance ;—you, who have never felt the dread of being turned penniless and friendless into the streets of London, you may scoff at him that he incurred so pitiful an obligation to such a man, coupled as it was with so revolting, so humbling a warning ; do so, you are happy that you have never known the value of possessing a home, poor and paltry though it might be, for seven days longer, when you know not but the next hour might have seen you driven forth to perish bodily from famine, or morally by violence and crime !

We will not dwell on a conversation which, feeling towards Eustace as we do, sickens us with disgust, and seems to paralyze our energies : suffice it, that Mr. Jobson, proud of being permitted to offer advice in a house where he was seldom allowed to speak above his breath, consented, and indeed volunteered, to “ look about ” for some situation which might enable Eustace at all events to retain his lodgings, and,—to pay for them.



When he had left the room, the unhappy young man sank upon a chair: he did not weep—he did not even sigh; he felt like one who was dreaming a heavy, fearful dream,—a victim of night-mare—a crushed and blighted wretch. He passed his hand across his eyes, and then looked hurriedly round his confined and dreary apartment,—*his* only on sufferance. How long he had sat in the same attitude, without motion, and almost without thought, he knew not, when he was aroused by a gentle knock at his door. He rose mechanically and opened it, and as he drew back in surprise, Miss Clarissa Jobson entered the room and closed it after her. She was a pretty, coquettish, over-dressed girl of about eighteen years of age; this was the first visit which she had ever ventured to pay him, and amid all his anguish, he groaned in spirit as he reflected that the knowledge of his poverty had subjected him to the inquisitive intrusion of the tallow-chandler's daughter. But Eustace was

in error: there was a slight moisture in the bright eyes of his visitor which argued a better motive, and her very, her scrupulously respectful curtsy reconciled him at once to her presence.

“ I ought to apologize for intruding on you, sir ;” she began with a rising blush, after she had for a moment waited in vain for a greeting from Mortimer; “ but as mamma mentioned to me that the only book she had seen in your room was a Bible, I have made free to bring you ‘ The Pleasures of Sensibility,’ and the third volume of the ‘ Tales of my Landlord;’ unfortunately, Miss Tomkins over the way has the two first, but when she returns them, I shall lose no time in sending them up.”

“ Pray take a chair, ma’am ;” stammered Mortimer.

The offer was declined; the young lady whisked a little dust off the table with her pocket-handkerchief,—hesitated a short time,—blushed deeper than ever, and at length

spoke again. "The books were not my real errand, sir, but I was obliged to give papa a reason for wishing to pay you a visit."

Mortimer bowed.

"The fact is, Mr. Eustace, that I know the cause of your having asked to see papa this morning: I think I have it in my power to assist you—I am sure I have; may I hope that you will condescend to accept my assistance?"

Involuntarily Mortimer extended his hand in silence, for the voice of sympathy had overcome him; the fair daughter of Mr. Jobson put her own within it for an instant, and then moved a pace or two farther from him.

"I have a friend, sir,—an intimate friend;" she resumed, looking down steadily on her smartly-sandalled little foot; "who is engaged in reporting for a daily paper; he mentioned to me on Sunday, when he dined here, that a gentleman was wanted."—

"May the Almighty reward you!" faltered out the subdued Mortimer.



"Have I your permission to mention you to him?" she asked, eager with an intuitively fine feeling to abridge their conference, painful as she perceived it to be to Eustace: "if so, sir, I believe your services will be immediately required."

"I am ready, quite ready;—to-day—this moment."

"I will inform my friend within half-an-hour that you are willing to enter into an arrangement with his employers. I have already made papa promise that, in the event of an engagement presenting itself, he will—don't feel hurt, sir, but in London there is little faith placed in appearance or assertion,—so I took the liberty to request of papa that he would allow reference to be made to him of your—your respectability." Mortimer started and flushed; he was about to speak, but he saw a tear fall from the down-cast eyes of the kind-hearted girl, and he refrained.

"I see that you are shocked at the plainness

of my words, Mr. Eustace, and yet others might have named the necessity of such an arrangement, even more rudely. I must now mention to you; and believe me, sir, I do it from no suspicion of your integrity, but I *must* mention that I have had some difficulty in inducing papa to come forward so decidedly for a comparative stranger; he is a cautious man, Mr. Eustace; to you he must seem a coarse one, but he has been a good father to me; partial as he is to his money, and anxious as he is to increase its amount, he has, nevertheless, bestowed on me an education which I value more than the property that he will leave me at his death; under these circumstances I am naturally desirous that no annoyance nor embarrassment should happen to him by my means; I therefore wish you, sir, to—to—to remember that in the event of—of anything occurring at all unpleasant between you and your employers, I shall be the person blamed for having caused papa to answer for you, but

no, no,"—she continued, raising her eyes to those of Mortimer, as he was about to speak :  
" I am quite sure that we are safe."

" On my soul you are !" exclaimed Eustace.

" And now, sir, as a friend, (if I may venture to use such a word) will you forgive me, if I beg of you to summon my father again, and to propose your removal into the apartments overhead? I have already hinted to you his fondness for money, and he will soon get another tenant for these: I know that I am going very far with you, too far, perhaps: but they will not be so expensive, and—and—if your payments should be less regular than you could wish, papa will think less of it, and not trouble you on the subject."—Eustace walked up to her, and took her hand: " To my dying day," he said in a firm but husky voice; " I shall remember the occurrence of this morning; I am a beggar even in thanks, but I will do all that you desire of me; give me an hour to indulge my own thoughts, and

you, young lady, have made many of them pleasant ones! and then I will see your father." Mortimer still held her hand, and she did not attempt to withdraw it; she saw and felt at once that no impulse of idle or offensive gallantry prompted its retention: and she stood passively before him, with her eyes fixed on the floor, waiting until he should speak again. After the struggle of a moment with his own feelings, he *did* speak; and it was with a faltering voice and a burning cheek.

"I am about to do that which may make me appear despicable in your eyes; and yet sorry as I should be to lose the gratifying interest in your pure and benevolent heart, which you have even now evinced, I must confess, that a feeling of pride, (false pride, you will perhaps say, and I am ready to allow that it is so,) makes me shrink from the idea of having the name of that father whom I revered and honored, coupled with poverty; and, it may be, with my own unsuccessful efforts to earn a

scanty and precarious subsistence. I have already confessed, this day, that I have neither home nor friends; and yet, I would not, if I may avoid it, lose the delightful impression, which lingers with me when that name is uttered; for I remember"—the voice of Eustace sank almost to a whisper;—"I remember that among the simple people over whom my father was pastor for forty years, it was never pronounced without deep respect, and often with uncovered heads—the world would bandy it with a laugh of scorn, if it were unfortunate; and though there is not one eye on earth that would shed a tear, or guess that the last Eustace was wounded by so trivial a circumstance, yet the arrow would be in my heart——and now;" and he smiled, a bitter, withering smile; "I will cast off my lethargy of sorrow, with my name; I will prepare to wrestle with the world; farewell, and when you meet your friend, tell him"—he wrung her hand convulsively, "tell him that *Mr. Smith*—

son requests to see him at his earliest convenience."

And thus, within a few months, did two of the personages of our tale listen to the same humiliating proposal, but with very different feelings. Frank Harcourt told the story of the second floor, highly embellished, and considerably augmented, at a fashionable clubhouse, within a week after it occurred; and Mortimer Eustace cast himself on his knees as the door closed on his landlord's only child, and returned humble and sincere thanks to Providence, that amid the wilderness where his hand was in no man's, and no man's hand in his, a friend had been raised up for him, even in the low-born daughter of Jacob Jobson, the tallow-chandler.



## CHAPTER V.

THE widow's bill was cashed; Mrs. Fisher's bill was paid; and Harcourt prepared for the business of the toilette with a light heart and a cheerful eye; his coat fitted like a glove, his glossy curls seemed inspired, for they clustered round his brow even more becomingly than usual; his delicate *bas à jour* clung to his ancles as though they were vain of the symmetry they adorned; and his faultless pumps were worthy of the exalted honour of being filled by the well-shaped feet of Mr. Frank Harcourt. Byron never wrote a line which the handsome young barrister, senti-

mental as he was, so highly approved, as that in which he advanced his opinion that delicate hands and feet were decided proofs of high blood. Frank *felt* that they at least merited high fortune. He sprang into his cabriolet, seized the white reins in his still whiter gloves, and turned the head of his horse towards Baker Street.

"Mr. Harcourt!" announced a tall footman, in a voice pitched, at least, three notes too high, and Frank entered the widow's drawing-room. Mr. Marsden, looking as neat, and as precise, and as well-powdered as usual, advanced towards the new arrival to lead him to the fair hostess, who was punctiliously particular on the subject of introductions, and Frank at once resigned himself to the guidance of this self-elected master of the ceremonies. There were two ladies in the room: one of them was seated in a padded red morocco lounge, with an asthmatic-looking, unwieldy spaniel in her lap: she was certainly, as Frank decided at

the first glance, considerably on the wrong side of sixty; cold, corpulent, and cautious; the other might be some fifteen or twenty years younger, pale, thin, and sad-looking, with a head-attire of blonde, besprinkled with large, and somewhat dilapidated damask roses; to the former of these ladies Mr. Marsden hastened to present the young barrister; and surely never was a castle in the clouds more instantaneously overthrown, and more utterly annihilated, than that of Frank, when the thin lips of Marmaduke Marsden parted with one of his most gentle smiles, as he made Mrs. Wilkins and Mr. Harcourt personally known to each other. The worshipper of the ideal widow could have sunk on the hearth-rug at the feet of the real one, beside a second plethoric-looking spaniel, so completely was he confounded; but the voice of Mr. Marsden recalled him to a sense of his situation, as it more carelessly added, "and Miss Parsons." Poor Miss Parsons!

she bowed, and smiled; and thought the young barrister a very interesting, as well as a very clever young man: wondered how much he was past thirty, and decided in her own mind that he would be a great acquisition to their parties. When Frank had taken a chair, he had leisure to look round, and speculate on the other two individuals who were to share in the hospitality of "his" widow. The one nearest to him was Mr. Billington, a banker in the city,—the five hundred pound bill had been drawn on that firm,—and he at once decided on being particularly civil to Mr. Billington until his plans were matured: the second gentleman, Harcourt at once understood to be the lady's apothecary, by the simple fact of his looking anxiously towards her whenever she indulged in a short, fidgetty sort of cough; the only evil of which appeared to be, that it disturbed the over-fed quadruped on her knee, which, on every convulsion of its resting-place, opened its eyes drowsily, and

licked its lips, as if in the very act of awakening from a dream of most savoury import; while the gentleman, on his part, slightly shook his head, and then glanced at Miss Parsons. No one could look at Miss Parsons for ten seconds without comprehending perfectly the relation in which that lady stood to the rich widow: she was a companion,—a hanger on,—a protégée. And here we are inclined to moralize;—those who prefer fiction to fact, may turn over the next half-dozen pages unread.

Few things can be more decided proofs of a weak mind, or an imperfect disposition, than a rage for “patronizing;” and yet nothing is more common than to see a female dangler *poodle-izing* in the footsteps of a superior, either in wealth or station, as a protégée: strangely, indeed, is the term frequently misapplied! Did that superior truly *protect* her dependent, it were well; but the very fact of her being a protégée, (in the



worldly acceptance of the word,) brings wounded feeling and biting contumely in its train, as surely as it does the lowest place at the board, and the backward seat in the carriage. The protégée is a creature of convenience: a carrier of shawls, parasols, and muffs; an antagonist of duns, a vis-à-vis of unpleasant visitors, an interlude between the mistress and her establishment, a laugher at bad jokes, and a listener to stale stories! Let any reasonable being ask himself if this be indeed protection? to feel every hour, nay, every moment, the bitterness of inferiority; to eat the bread of dependence, thickly overspread with the gall of contumely and neglect; to lie down to rest with the glow of wounded feeling yet mantling the throbbing brow, and to rise to new trials, new slights, and new debasements!

I have but sketched one picture from a loaded gallery. The veteran protégée takes new features from habit, for the heart atro-



phises at length, loses its elasticity, and becomes seared by custom, when it is not finely enough constituted to induce premature apathy, or reckless emancipation from its corroding thralldom. The patterer in the path of fashion becomes gradually habituated to the crumbling of the sand-pile over which she tracks her goddess; the satellite performs its evolutions instinctively round the superior luminary from which it draws its light; the old campaigner in the field of subserviency, feels a sympathy with every familiar object around her, but with persons, none; for the soul naturally recoils from that which repels it, and exhausts its diminished energies rather on inanimate, than on uncongenial objects. Her travelling is a type of her whole existence: she looks not on that which is to come, but on the past: although the retrospect offers neither matter of interest nor pleasure; she laughs, without effort, when she is least amused; sighs,

when she cannot sympathize; assents, when she has no opinion; and, like a repeater, always responds to the touch. Is this protection?—*this!* Where is the man who would desire such a fate for his ill-omened child? Rather let her eat the bread of honest toil, beneath the straw roof of poverty and hardship! What avails it that the couch be of velvet, and the pillow down, if the hair-suspended sword tremble for ever above her head? What, that the banquet be rich, and the viands costly, if the poison of neglect mingle in the feast? I have looked on the pale cheek and painful smile of one of these children of misfortune, until the pulses of my heart have quickened as I gazed; I have heard the hollow laugh mocking at the earth-bowed spirit it so ill-disguised; and seen the forced frivolity clinging, like a scanty garment, about the bursting heart it wanted width to shroud! This is at once the keenest and the bitterest of suffering; for it is

one which is generally unappreciated and unpitied. How can the powerful "protector" of the victim waste a thought on the heavy interest which she is exacting from her miserable debtor? As soon might the sun be expected to dream, while he is casting his broad beams upon the earth, that any blossom could be withering from their very intensity.

The history of such a protégée is brief and painful; a youth of deadened hope and barren anticipation,—a womanhood of neglect and blighted feeling,—and an old age of isolation, bitterness and discontent!

Sad indeed were it if such a picture had no reverse; but so frequently are these fanciful adoptions the mere offsprings of caprice and thoughtlessness, that the number of those which terminate unhappily far out-run the more prosperous and successful.

Unfortunate also are the results of many, which owe their origin to pure benevolence;

unfortunate, from the injudicious mismanagement of kind, but weak minds. A beautiful orphan, perhaps, a little cottage maiden, with eyes and cheeks bright and glowing as hope, or as the wild flowers among which she had been used to sport, excites affection, alike by her beauty and her bereavement; it is enough—the united claims of loveliness and orphanage are irresistible; and she is rescued from the evils of want and neglect, only to be exposed to greater, because more seductive trials. She is surrounded by luxury and elegance; clad in stuffs of which she had hitherto not known the name, nor guessed the existence; made, it may be, the toy of the drawing-room, the plaything of the boudoir; dazzled with light and flattery,—unconscious that another and a darker day must succeed to the sunny hours which are gliding so swiftly over her. But that day comes at length; the child ripens into the woman; she can no longer be the plaything of her patroness; she has begun to

feel that for her there is no morrow either of hope or of affection,—the pure and honest feelings of infancy have been uprooted and cast away; she is spirit-bent by luxury and indulgence; she has a thousand fictitious wants, a thousand false necessities, which cry aloud and will not be silenced,—to use the beautiful and expressive language of scripture—she “cannot dig, to beg (she) is ashamed.” Thus she lives on and on, and finally terminates her apprenticeship to fashion by a marriage uncongenial to the pampered refinement of her nature, or degenerates into the mere creature of submission and obedience. And yet this very adoption may have originated in the sincere and commendable desire of benefiting a little creature so helpless, so bereaved, and, above all, so beautiful! But the heart-clasp of a stranger relaxes after a time; the natural claim is wanting in such an union, and admiring and delighted affection degenerates into mere generous kindness. Even that



kindness, inadequate as it is to supply the place of the feeling which it succeeds, is meritorious; but, alas! how do the chilling gradations of exhausted sensibility wither the young heart of the victim, as they slowly follow each other, and at length subside into the mere calmness of charitable protection!

Let the benevolent spirit pause an instant to reflect on the vast importance of the responsibility which it would impose upon itself; let it—to quote once more the words of that blessed volume which cannot err—"do the good deed warily, that evil may not come of it;" and 'patronage' will then become an honourable privilege, and the protégée a happy and a benefitted being.

And now, as Rabelais was wont to say, "*revenons à nos moutons!*"

Harcourt saw, within the first ten minutes of his domestication in the widow's social circle, that to succeed in whatever speculation he



might decide to venture upon, to ensure to himself some of the good things in the lady's gift, he must adopt a totally different course from that which appeared to be the universal system at present followed in Baker Street. He determined, however, not to marry Mrs. Wilkins, if he could obtain her money by legacy, or otherwise, without so doing; for the mist of his cloudland edifice, so rudely dissolved by the wrinkles of the wealthy widow, was not yet altogether dissipated. Never had a more apt pupil than Harcourt had proved himself under the lessons of his friend Nichols, fitted a smile to his lips for the world's use,—but nevertheless the widow *was* really rather too old—too—Frank never called any woman ugly, therefore he swallowed the word, and substituted—*passée*! We are often indebted to our lively and imaginative continental neighbours for a courteous term to smooth down the edges of our opinions, and yet to signify precisely the same

thing as our own more honest and uncompromising mode of expression. The system in Baker Street, at which we have already hinted, was to offer worship to the golden idol; to bend the knee to Mammon, or, in plainer language, to agree in all Mrs. Wilkins's opinions, in order to be mentioned in her will; to assent to all her propositions, in the hope of a legacy; and to love where she loved, (which required very infrequent exertion,) and to dislike where she disliked, (which was a virtue pretty constantly exercised) in the vague prospect of reaping a golden harvest when Mrs. Wilkins should remain to her friends only in the shape of her last will and testament. Such was the state of affairs. When the widow looked grave and uneasy, Mr. Marmaduke Marsden twirled his thumbs, and seemed almost afraid of raising his eyes to a fine portrait of the late Mr. Wilkins, which adorned the space between the two windows, looking as stern and as uncomfortable as though he were jealous of the

fat spaniel on his wife's knee; the apothecary shook his head and glanced at Miss Parsons; the banker let his chin fall on his chest, and appeared to be calculating on his fingers the current value of bank stock; and poor Miss Parsons herself appeared as if longing to steal out of the room, if she had dared.

"There is nothing for it," said Harcourt mentally, "but impudence; the very novelty of the thing will prove an attraction."

"I trust that my good friend Mr. Marsden has thanked you better than it is in my power to do, Mr. Harcourt," said the widow, as soon as Frank had possessed himself of a chair; "for your very great and very able exertions in the late affair which you were kind enough to undertake for me."

Mr. Marsden looked delighted, and even Miss Parsons smiled.

Frank made a courteous reply; and, as he spoke, he bent his large eyes with a glance of such gallant interest on the widow, that she

never doubted for an instant, but that, as he affirmed, defeat would have annihilated him. She looked down, patted her lap-dog, thought how very handsome Mr. Harcourt was when animated, and spoke again.

"I fear that you will scarcely find our, that is, *my* parties, gay enough, Mr. Harcourt, to compensate for the loss of your valuable time." She said this in a tone of proud humility: "Ever since the death of my departed husband, I have lived a very secluded life; indeed, with the exception of a nephew, you see to-day all the individuals who are in habits of intimacy with me." The three gentlemen bowed. "Mr. Billington is my banker; it is a pleasant thing, Mr. Harcourt, to be on good terms with your banker." It was so seldom that the *rich* Mrs. Wilkins condescended to perpetrate a jest, that it was no wonder her present attempt was such a poor one, or that it gave her, what she considered to be, a very violent fit of coughing. The fat spaniel opened its eyes,

and stared at Harcourt, and the lean apothecary, who was in the very act of ejaculating "Very good indeed, really"—stopped suddenly short in the middle of the sentence; shook his head more portentously than usual, and glanced at Miss Parsons.

"Mr. Smith is my medical attendant; I consider myself to be peculiarly indebted to Mr. Smith"—the widow paused, and Mr. Smith bowed very low indeed; the acknowledgment savoured of a legacy. "I really believe that he has, by his very great ability, saved my life, as I have always been considered decidedly consumptive."

A convulsion passed over Frank's features: Mrs. Wilkins actually obscured the light from the back drawing-room window.

"Mr. Marsden," pursued the widow, after she had witnessed the effect which this awful declaration had produced on the circle; "Mr. Marsden I need not more particularly mention to you, as it was through his considerate



kindness that I had the pleasure of being made known to Mr. Harcourt."

"And a devilish good fellow I know Marmaduke Marsden to be, madam:" exclaimed Frank, springing from his chair, and wringing the hand of little Maxim almost to dislocation. Miss Parsons turned up her eyes till nothing was visible but the whites; such a word as the one which Frank had just uttered, had not frightened that room from its propriety since the death of Mr. Wilkins. The gentlemen sat in motionless silence, save indeed poor Mr. Marsden, whose eyes were actually moist from the agony of his very particular friend's pressure.

"What amiable vivacity!" murmured the widow to the companion.

"Very, indeed, ma'am!" assented Miss Parsons, recovering from her trance.

At this moment dinner was announced: Mr. Billington was calmly, according to custom, preparing to hand the widow down stairs,



but a revolution was approaching in Baker Street; Harcourt sprang up, trod on the banker's toe in his great haste, begged his pardon with a smile of perfect good-breeding, rushed towards the widow, caught up the corpulent spaniel carefully from her knee, and with Mrs. Wilkins on one arm, and the dog under the other, led the way to the dining-room. Poor Mr. Billington was fairly distanced; and quietly permitting the medical gentleman who had overcome the widow's consumptive tendency to hand Miss Parsons down, as he was wont, he followed in their wake with Mr. Marsden, shrugging his shoulders, and looking as though he had just heard of the failure of his Petersburg correspondents.

"She'll never stand this;" whispered little Marmaduke, as they were half way down stairs, "he'll never be asked to dinner here again!" and he absolutely staggered, as he saw on entering the room, that his dear friend Mr. Harcourt had his hand on the chair at the

foot of the table, and was preparing to take possession of it, without any further ceremony. "Bless me! I hope he's a bad carver, or we're all cut out!" was his mental ejaculation as he slid into a seat beside Miss Parsons.

But Frank knew how to play his cards better than to force himself into an office, which he was inadequate to fill respectably: he was a very excellent carver, and no young man of his standing better understood the whole arcana of the table; thanks to the exquisite bachelor-dinners of his friend Nichols. He parted the turbot like an alderman, and sent the fins to Mrs. Wilkins;—he initiated the party into the mysteries of a new dish, just imported from the land of cooks, and quite "exclusive." Mrs. Wilkins doted on great people, and scarce things; he talked very learnedly on wines; indeed, Miss Parsons began to think that his father must have been in the trade, but she did not say so; and the widow gave her butler a very signi-

ficant look, to which he replied by leaving the room, and returning with some of her best champagne. Meanwhile nothing was lost on Frank, from the massy epergne and wine coolers, to the shoulder-knots of the servants: the stake was worth playing for at all events; and at the very moment when he came to this decision, he caught sight of Mr. Billington's sharp grey eye fixed on the widow, and his small white hand fastened on a decanter. Frank saw that he was about to ask the widow to take a glass of wine—he bent forward; Mrs. Wilkins was in the act of speaking to Mr. Smith,—the banker was waiting patiently until she had concluded her remark,—therefore, here again the day was his own; he had noticed the reappearance of the butler with his precious burthen, and at once unhesitatingly broke in upon a discussion on some very interesting subject, if that could be called discussion which was almost entirely talking on one side, and listen-

ing on the other; by exclaiming, with one of his best smiles, and in his blindest tone, "really, Mr. Smith, we must not allow you to exhaust Mrs. Wilkins by so elaborate a discussion at present:—" the widow looked towards him, half-surprised and half-diverted by the novelty of the circumstance; he caught her eye:—"the pleasure of a glass of champagne with you, madam?"—the lady bowed, and smiled; and ill-fated Mr. Billington withdrew his hand from the madeira decanter, and went on with his dinner.

## CHAPTER VI.

"A VERY charming young man, that Mr. Harcourt;" said Mrs. Wilkins as she took possession of her red morocco settlement, and made a comfortable lap for Mop, the fat spaniel, on her return to the drawing-room.

"Very indeed, ma'am;" replied Miss Parsons, as she drew out an unfinished purse from her knitting case, and prepared to add half a dozen more rows to it.

"So easy in his manners!" remarked the widow.

"Remarkably so;" assented the companion.

"And really has some very eligible acquaintance, Parsons; did you notice how fa-

miliarly he spoke of the Earl of Somerville, and Lady Clara Ashburnham?"

"Yes, ma'am;—my patience—I've dropped a stitch!"

"Do you know," pursued Mrs. Wilkins mysteriously, "I've a great idea that there is something very particular between him and Lady Clara"—

"Very likely, ma'am;—dear me, how unlucky I *have* been with this purse!"

"Pray don't talk so much, Miss Parsons;" said the widow peevishly, "you distract my head."

"Very well, ma'am:" and the companion was as silent as a statue.

In two minutes Mrs. Wilkins was asleep; and so was Mop, and even Zoë on the hearth-rug, and Miss Parsons might as well have been asleep too, for not another word was spoken till the gentlemen left the dining-room.

Immediately on entering, Frank displaced a table, which looked as though it had stood on the same spot since the deluge, to seat himself



beside Mrs. Wilkins; and he chatted, and smiled, and looked so handsome, that by the time Miss Parsons had superintended the coffee, and the footmen were making the tour of the guests with their silver salvers, Harcourt's arm was on that of the widow's easy chair, and he had completely superceded Mop in her attentions. The lady was remarkably partial to cream, but Frank so strenuously and anxiously labored to convince her that it was highly prejudicial to health, and moreover so gravely and confidentially assured her that *café noir* was quite the rage at Devonshire House, that she took her second cup of coffee under his direction; and although she would almost as soon have swallowed a dose of laudanum, she felt perfectly convinced that *café noir* was a very delicious beverage. Miss Parsons meanwhile was lost in wondering how Mr. Frank Harcourt knew the fashion in which they drank their coffee at Devonshire House—but she did not ask him.

Cards were mentioned: the banker, the apothecary, and the man of business looked anxiously towards Frank: here was another test of his rapidly rising popularity; but they were fairly distanced again. Mr. Harcourt liked whist; was, in fact, very partial to whist; considered whist the only game on the cards; the good, old, scientific, long whist; sixpenny points, or perhaps silver three-pences; silver three-pences were a very pleasant stake, just high enough to keep the interest of the rubber alive, and not sufficiently so to render the fact of losing or winning of consequence to any one.

These were precisely Mrs. Wilkins's sentiments on the subject. We may as well remark here, *par parenthèse*, that during the tête-à-tête which Frank lately enjoyed with Mr. Marsden in the Park, he had mentioned that his bereaved friend was very domesticated in her tastes, and that she indulged in no dissipation whatever, beyond a few rubbers of long whist, and even then that she never ex-

ceeded sixpenny points. Marmaduke Marsden, poor man! had quite forgotten the fact of his having volunteered this gratuitous piece of information to the young barrister on that memorable occasion; but Frank had not; and he yet remembered also how much he had marvelled that the lovely widow could derive any amusement from a rubber of long sixpenny whist, with dumpy Mr. Marsden for her vis-à-vis. He could have laughed as the recollection crossed his mind; but not so the man of business; who was perfectly petrified and bewildered to hear the gay and reckless Frank Harcourt, who was known to bet more than he could pay at his club, and to frequent more than one fashionable hell, talking about —mercy on him! he was so astonished, that he could not even muster a maxim!

They sat down: Frank was opposed to the widow; they played seven mortal rubbers, and Mrs. Wilkins rose a winner of three points.

“Ninepence,” said the literal Miss Parsons,

who had of course been a spectator, as they could make up the table without her.

"*Silver* threepences, ma'am;" remarked Marsden, who was waiting for his shilling from the banker.

While this short dialogue proceeded, Frank affected to be industriously searching his pockets; he made the round of them, and then commencing from the same point, tried them all again: the result was similar,—no money!

"I have positively left my purse on my dressing table!" he exclaimed, at length; "how very *gauche*! may I trust that you will pardon me for this act of carelessness, my dear madam, until we next meet?"

Who could resist an appeal made even more with the eyes than the lips; particularly when the eyes were very handsome ones, dark blue, with eye-lashes long and silken, resting like a fringe upon the cheeks? Mrs. Wilkins could not; and although she had drawn out her card-purse to deposit Frank's shilling within



it, she put it back again into her pocket, with an assurance that the circumstance was of no consequence, and mentally marvelling whether he would remember his debt when he saw her again. This momentous affair settled, Harcourt shook hands with Mrs. Wilkins, bowed to the apothecary, the banker, and the man of business, nodded to Miss Parsons, and sprang into his cabriolet, which had been announced two hours before; delighted at having, by a fortunate thought, made an errand for the morrow; when he resolved that his liberality should dispel the cloud on the brow of the butler, whom he found in the hall on his way to the vehicle, and win a more respectful bow from the footman who officiated as porter, than that with which he honoured him on the present occasion. Thus would he earn the reputation in the drawing-room of being remarkably punctual in the discharge of his card-accounts, and in the servants'-hall, that of being "quite a gentleman."

## CHAPTER VII.

"UPON my word, papa, you are mistaken," said Lady Clara Ashburnham; "I have no more idea of marrying Mr. Harcourt, than you have of proposing for the widow of a deceased lord mayor."

"I have very little to say on the subject," remarked the earl, drily; "only remember this: you are not so young as you have been, and it is quite time that you were established. You know that I cannot give you anything worth mentioning, and a penniless lady of quality has a very poor chance of marrying in her own set, unless she be a beauty, or"—

"Really, my lord, you have said all this so



often, that I literally know it by heart," observed the young lady, somewhat peevishly, as she amused herself by rolling up one of the leaves of Frazer's Magazine between her finger and thumb: "and it is not so agreeable, as to bear daily repetition. You must have a very poor opinion of your own powers of convincing, if you imagine that you have not yet succeeded in making an impression, after all the hours which you have bestowed on this interminable subject."

"Very well, Lady Clara, very well," said Lord Somerville; "you are certainly old enough to take care of yourself." The lady winced, but made no reply. "I had a most unexceptionable alliance in view for you, one which, I think, by a little management, I could have secured; but if you choose to disgrace your family by a love-match, why, as I before remarked, you are old enough to act for yourself."

"Your remarks are, as usual, very apposite

and agreeable, my lord, and highly considerate; and I have, being old enough to do so, as you politely express it, been thinking seriously for myself."

"And the result is, doubtless," said the earl contemptuously, "that the soft glances, and smooth tongue of a penniless lawyer, a briefless barrister, a needy fortune-hunter"—

"A what, my lord?" asked Lady Clara, with significant abruptness.

"Pshaw!" muttered the noble father, contracting his dark eye-brows, "that the pretty love-speeches of such an adventurer as the one I describe, I say, have brought the very well-laid designs, and commendable plans of the daughter of Lord Somerville to premature maturity."

"The man is very handsome, very agreeable, and perfectly well-bred," said the lady.

"Will his beauty hire a town-house, his agreeability furnish a good stud, or his fine breeding find you in pin-money?"

"Alas, no!"

"How, then, can you hold so paltry an argument?"

"Simply because it affords conversation; and I could not be rude enough to tell you that you have made a very bad guess."

"Do not trifle, Clara; if you knew—if you could understand how anxious I am to see you eligibly established"—

"And do you think that I doubt it, my lord? no, no, I know it, I understand it well; and now listen to me: To put your own assertion in a somewhat less disagreeable form, I have been younger; I might be handsomer; but *I am* the daughter of the Earl of Somerville;" the lady spoke somewhat haughtily, and the brow of his lordship became less dark: "is not that one fact sufficient to ensure an eligible establishment, in both your acceptance of the term, and my own? I do not mean a coronet, for I have ceased to expect that; girls grow with such imperti-

nent rapidity, that I am now elbowed by raw misses, whom I remember in their nurseries, and long to whip out of my way; but a golden goose!" the lady laughed, so did his lordship, and she went on: "I think I have found one;" she rose from her seat, and laid her hand on the earl's shoulder, "imagine, my lord, a plebeian,—oh, I see I may go on! for I detect not the indignant start of sensitive high birth;—no blood in his veins, a mere infusion of gold-dust in small beer."

"Never mind that, Clara," smilingly interposed the listener; "ours will enrich it."

"Under-bred, but yet not quite anti-presentible; allied to all sorts of persons, in all sorts of businesses:"—

"He must cut them"—was the quiet rejoinder.

"Willing to pay well for a high-born wife, whom he may call 'her ladyship' to his servants; for an aristocratic father-in-law, on whose arm he may be seen hanging in St.

James's Street; and two or three noble brothers, whose gaming debts he may have the honour of discharging, in return for being permitted to drive them about in his equipages, lend them his horses, and be laughed at for his pains."

"Every thing that could be wished!" ejaculated the delighted father.

"But I must be well paid on my side, my lord," said Lady Clara, with a shade of gravity suddenly stealing over the hitherto scornful expression of her face; "remember, *I* am to be the sacrifice. My 'golden calf' has—guess!

"Nay, how can I guess, my love?" asked the earl, blandly.

"Well, then, upwards of thirty thousand a-year; he is nephew and heir to"——

"The late wealthy Mr. Roberts!" cried Lord Somerville. "My dear, dear Clara, my reliance on your sagacity has not been misplaced: the very individual whom I was about to propose to you; dying, my love, to ally



himself to noble blood; ready to bite at any proposal, to make any settlement, to accede to all sorts of unexceptionable arrangements; nothing could be more à propos."

"Nichols is a vile name!" sneered the lady.

"What's in a name?" smiled the earl.

There was a pause. "And what think you, my lord," at length exclaimed Lady Clara, "when I tell you that the penniless lawyer, the briefless barrister, the—but I will not repeat his other designation,—what think you, I ask, when I tell you that this very calumniated Mr. Harcourt was the identical person who introduced to Lady Clara Ashburnham the unexceptionable Joseph Nichols Esquire, nephew and heir of Mr. Roberts, of golden memory? I will tell you how it occurred: I passed these two worthies in Pall Mall, linked together, if not altogether after the same fashion, at least as closely as the Siamese Twins. I knew Mr. Nichols à l'œil: I had taken some pains to do so; I pulled the

check-string, and nodded to the young barrister, who was at the carriage door in an instant, leaving his friend planted on the trottoir; I offered him a ticket for my aunt's ball, then asked who his friend was, but made no remark, and did not enquire if it was 'the rich' Mr. Nichols, merely saying, that if he liked to introduce him, and of course he would not introduce any one at all objectionable, I should be happy to give him a second ticket; but could not do so, unless I were able to assure my aunt that both gentlemen were *personally* known to me, as she was scrupulously particular on that point. My poor aunt! who will probably, with her bad sight, not recognize one-eighth of her guests. Harcourt was instantly all grace and gratitude: a motion of his hand brought Mr. Nichols to our side; I noticed that he bowed low, very low, to my ladyship; but when he heard that he actually had the prospect of attending a countess's

ball, I really thought he would have swooned: I had half-resolved to offer him my flacon when he recovered. Well, we chatted for some time: Harcourt was all vivacity, and his friend all humility; I put on my best smiles, and have even promised to dance with these two eastern deities!"

"You will require a new dress for your aunt's ball, my love," said the earl, throwing a note-case on the table; "only remember that you are not yet Lady Clara Nichols."

And this was one of the preliminaries of a fashionable marriage!

As the earl left the room, Lady Clara took two or three turns across the floor, looked steadily at herself in a large mirror in front of her, and smiled with a smile of bitter scorn. Just as she was moving away, a servant announced the Countess of Blacksley.

Lady Blacksley was a widow; she had married the late Earl because his friends told her that it was a very excellent match, and because

his lordship offered to settle all her property on herself. She married him accordingly, and lived as happily as a woman with dissipated tastes could be expected to live with a man who buried himself in a dreary old family seat for six months of the year, and ate himself into the gout in town for the other six; particularly when that man was very old, very ugly, and very ill-tempered. Ill-temper begets ill-manners, and ill-manners beget disagreements; and so Lord and Lady Blacksley had snarled and snapped through life together, like two ill-matched mastiffs, for eight or ten years. At length the gouty and grumbling old earl was quietly laid to rest in the family vault; and forthwith Lady Blacksley arrived in town, all wailing and weepers; and sat in a darkened room, and received company, and played at *ecarté* for five guineas a game; and talked of her bereavement and the dear deceased, until she almost induced some people to believe that she really must have cared a little for the late



earl; but they were mere slight acquaintance, her own set knew better, and only laughed in their sleeves. She had been some years a widow; and amply had she revenged herself for her period of matrimonial durance and endurance. Her hair, her teeth, her complexion, all were independent of the decay of time: she was a specimen of animated patchwork,—a mere foundation for cosmetic and millinery experiments; fussy, fidgetty, and fantastical: she was in every body's way, and at every body's service; an enthusiastic amateur physician, an indefatigable match-maker,—a perambulating newspaper, and an elaborate retailer of social small-talk. She had a good jointure and a good table, consequently she had many friends, and no one laughed at her to her face; while she wandered about from house to house giving advice, which was very rarely followed; mixing herself up in affairs with which she had not the slightest concern: and exhibiting in her own little person a most amusing illus-



tration of laborious idleness. It is astonishing what a vast quantity of business, individuals of this stamp contrive to extract from nothing at all, the "alps on alps" that arise out of a newspaper paragraph, which with its dashes and asterisks, *may* mean every one, and very frequently means no one. The conjectures, the inferences, the resolutions, the consequential 'takings up,' and 'droppings' to which it may lead, through the nods, and shakes, and sighings of these very busy people; the curious and intricate patchings together of disjointed conversations, all going on together, and keeping both ears, and all the senses, so tightly on the stretch, that at the rebound, forth comes the whole fragmentary mass, patched into one heterogeneous and bewildering whole, sufficient to confuse the most methodical and truth-seeking person breathing. Good natured people are quite grieved to hear that Lady Elizabeth and Sir John have had their names coupled together

in so extraordinary a manner, though, perhaps, one of them was mentioned as being half way to Florence for the benefit of a pulmonary attack, and the other as having married a German Count, and left England for Vienna; well, after all it turns out to have been a mistake, and then it is agreed by some of the set that no woman could ever have thought seriously of so consumptive, sickly-looking a man as Sir John: and the others are equally reluctant to believe that a young baronet, with a large unincumbered estate, and no sisters, would have formed a liason of any description with so very uninteresting a woman as Lady Elizabeth. There is no harm done! They none of them believed it at the time when the very extraordinary and unaccountable report was propagated; though they all agree that more caution ought certainly to be observed in circulating such very unpleasant rumours; and meanwhile the foolish affair has made them delightfully busy for an entire week!

Lady Blacksley was the very mouth-piece and main-spring of a select clique of these agreeable gossips: women who were unexceptionable in every respect; quite a *recherché* set; people above all suspicion of wilfully misrepresenting any person or any thing; to be sure, poor human nature is fallible in all its varieties, consequently these high-born and high-bred matrons might now and then be mistaken, but their ever being wilfully in error was quite out of the question, of course——

“I was afraid that I should miss you;” commenced Lady Blacksley, before she was fairly into the room, bustling up to the sofa on which Lady Clara had just seated herself; and sinking, quite out of breath, amid the pile of cushions; “I am so late: I thought it possible that you might be in the Park, so I came that way, and was detained for above ten minutes by Mrs. Trevannion, who told me the heads of a very sad report about a friend of ours,—so bad indeed, that if, when I have heard all

the particulars, I should feel as thoroughly convinced of the truth of the rumour, as I confess to you, (even knowing almost nothing at all about it, as is the case at present,) I am nevertheless very much inclined to do, we must really drop her acquaintance. You particularly, my dear, as a young unmarried woman, should be scrupulously careful with regard to your associates; and I shall make it a point with the earl that her name may be erased from your visiting list; for I am sure that when I am able to give you all the details of the affair, you will see the propriety of dropping her at once."

"And who, my dear aunt," demanded Lady Clara yawning, "may be the unfortunate person who is to be banished to the Siberia of your displeasure?"

"Oh! ay, very true, I did not mention her name; indeed it is a profound secret as yet,—I left Mrs. Trevannion in the very act of recommencing the story to old Lady Blabton."

"It will not be a secret long"—observed the niece.

"So I thought as I drove off; however, I propagate no scandal, and if Lady Blabton thinks proper to communicate poor Mrs. Thornton's contre temps to half London, you know it is no affair or fault of mine."

"Mrs. Thornton!" exclaimed the young lady; "what, that odious woman whom the men all thought so handsome at Almack's last season, with a rich husband in Bengal, and a fat aunt at Battersea?"

"The very same"—laughed the little countess.

"Ha! so this is the end of the Richmond villa, and the two white ponies; the diners sur l'herbe, and the Swiss fêtes!" and Lady Clara laughed in her turn: "I always thought that the dark-eyed nabobess looked as though she would one day come within the pale of the 'Society for the Suppression of Vice!'"

And was this all? did no pang of pity arise in the woman-heart for the erring one, who



had forfeited her station in society; the lovely one, whose eyes had been the mirrors wherein many had joyed to see themselves reflected; the elegant mind which had created a little world of fancy and *fäerie* around, and about it; the sparkling wit which had brightened all over which it played; the generous spirit which had shared alike its pleasures and its splendours? No:—this was all! This, and the self-gratulating reflection, that a wit, a beauty, and a rival, was removed from the world's paths. That her garlands had been withered, her lamp extinguished; and that the dull, the unlovely, and the selfish, were licensed in their insolence of virtue, to point the finger of scorn at her, who was once alike their envy and their dread! Not a thought was given to the danger of that precipice on the brink of which she had stood so proudly for awhile, and down which she had at length fallen; it might have been remembered that she was young, beautiful, and unprotected: that the

man, to whom the ill-judging ambition of her parents had united her, had but one care, and that was the pursuit of riches; that he had left her revelling in luxury, surrounded by flatterers, steeped in enervating dissipation, and in all the unbroken vivacity of health and youth, to the guidance and guardianship of her own inexperience, and that of an asthmatic superannuated old aunt. But this was forgotten: she had sinned the sin, and she must pay the price; the world is "a righteous judge;" society demands that detected vice should walk with a bent head and earth-bowed eyes, and the decision is a just one; but surely it were better to turn aside from the guilty one with a tear, than with a brow of scorn; it is worse than idle to strike at a fallen foe, when the iron has already eaten into his heart!

"It was quite disgraceful their admitting her to Almack's at all," remarked the countess; "a mere parvenue, all dash and dia-

monds, setting the young men's wits wandering, and, most probably, preventing some very eligible establishments! By-the-bye, my dear, do you know that I am very sanguine as to the match I mentioned to you the other day, between Mrs. Trevannion's solicitor, and the Marchioness of Mariton's French governess; it will be a very prudent and proper arrangement, for the eldest son returns from the continent very shortly, and you are aware that Mademoiselle de la Vallerie is vastly too pretty to be in the house with a wild, wilful young nobleman, just of age, and not over-obedient."

"Then why does not Lady Mariton recommend her to some other family? surely there is no occasion to make the poor man marry her *bon gré mal gré*!"

"Really, my love, you must be very obtuse not to see at once that there is an impediment to so summary a mode of getting rid of Mademoiselle; or you may be sure that neither

the marchioness nor I would have troubled ourselves at all with the business."

Lady Clara looked provokingly incredulous.  
"And this weighty reason?"

"Naughty girl!—you make me tell tales; however, to be candid with you, Lady Mariton offered her an exorbitant salary, to inveigle her away from the Duchess of Featheringham, who had waited three years for her; and as Mademoiselle de la Vallerie had an excellent wardrobe and a very well-filled private purse, why Lady Mariton very naturally did not hurry herself about the payment of the money when it became due; having had, (as we both know was the fact,) two very expensive seasons, and the marquis, being just the least in the world of a miser; now Mademoiselle's salary, (which the steward paid very punctually every quarter to his lady,) was a delightful addition to the ways and means of the marchioness; and Mademoiselle assured her so gracefully that it was not of the slightest consequence, so long

as she remained in the family, that of course Lady Mariton did not scruple, (as which of us would have done?) to avail herself of the money; thus, you see, the French woman is not to be so easily shaken off, and, as very fortunately she is *éprise à mourir* with the handsome Mr. Latitat, the match, (if it could be managed,) would be the most delightful thing in the world; as it would be easy enough to hint to the solicitor that it was not altogether convenient to settle with Mademoiselle; and by making her a present of a silver teapot, or a pair of pearl earrings, or something or other that Lady Mariton has by her, and would not miss, it would put them both into good humour, and give her time to retrench."

Lady Clara shuddered at the paltry details of the petty manœuvring of two women of fashion; her own personal interest was not concerned in it, and she saw it in all its pitiful vulgarity.



"The worst of it is," pursued the little countess, who loved to hear herself talk, "that Mr. Latitat cannot speak a word of French, and to be as lenient as possible to Mademoiselle's English, it is certainly very defective; however, they are both young, and have plenty of time to learn. And now, my dear, I must leave you, for I have a host of things to do; and it is well that I have, for there is but one room in my house fit to sit down in, preparing for to-morrow night; bring whoever you please, Clara, you know I gave you *carte blanche*; only beware of detrimentals and dowdies, or I shall quarrel with you,—au revoir;" and up sprang Lady Blacksley from the centre of the crimson satin cushions, kissed her niece between the eyes, settled her giraffe bonnet at a pier glass, and bustled out of the room, leaving Lady Clara with much the same sensation in her head as is occasioned by the rumbling of a fire engine over a paved street.

“ Thank God; she is gone !” was her affectionate ejaculation, as she threw herself back on the sofa, closed her eyes, and thought of Mr. Nichols, and the Countess’ ball.

## CHAPTER VIII.

How little do many of us reflect as the months and years speed past us, that they are utterly irreclaimable, and, however ill-spent, never to be amended. How little, as we mark the beautiful verdure and painted flowers of spring, succeeded by the more thickly scattered blossoms and brighter skies of summer; and those again replaced by the rich fruits, golden harvests, and changeful tints of autumn, when the blended and ever-varying hues of field and forest, like those of a kaleidoscope, present to the eye a variety at once beautiful and evanescent; yielding, in their turn, to the ice and hoar of winter;—

how little do we regard them, save as the mere common-place effects of the agency of nature! We forget, amid the world's cares, equally as amid its pleasures, that they are so many beckonings towards eternity: so many remembrancings of the flight of that time which the breath of monarchs cannot recal;—neither can the prayers of empire stay it!

We make a festival of the exit of the old year, and a rejoicing at the entry of the new one, as though this were the only observance required of us! and we do even this, frequently more from habit than from feeling. We follow the customs of our fathers: those fathers whom past years have swept into a dark and silent grave—man's last earthly heritage! To me, these rejoicings at the termination of the old year, have melancholy in their very mirth: I ever part from it as from a dear friend, never to be looked upon again; and but ill-replaced by its successor, which meets us with a scowl, as though it

mistrusted the hilarity which welcomes it. I say, a *dear* friend; for who is there among us who is not its debtor for some pleasing memory, some soul-knit recollection? A new year, on the contrary, is like a new scene; we are strangers to each other; there is no tie between us; all is barren speculation, and void uncertainty: what may we not endure ere we part company? pain, penury, or sickness: or that worst, that most refined of ills, the heart-loathing which knows no remedy; the blighted hope; the soul-less future; the spirit-void, whose immensity is to its victim even as the fathomless chaos from whence nature drew her being.

There is a spell on the heart,—at least it is so with me,—while the months pursue each other in that year which is endeared to us by the enjoyment of kindlier affection, brighter fate, or that far more equivocal good, deeper, stronger passion! Month after month speeds oh, yet time seems motionless, and the joyous



feeling is ever present to us ; that fairy-spell is broken at its close ; each link of the golden chain is worn through by the ceaseless friction of time ; and when the last gives way, the talismanic witchery of fancy, which had wound its own fetters around the soul, melts, like a vapour, with it ! We look back to the events of the departed year, as to something already far distant, and only rendered more beautiful by the condensation of memory ; but still it is painful beauty : the distinctness and individuality which once pleased, lose their charm ; the tenacious retention of past joy, darkens the tablet of anticipation ; and seems to woo us from the present to the past. Imagination, reckless of the future, loiters among departed pleasures, and strews added roses over each glowing retrospection ; the landscape of spent life offers, by her aid, only the sunny valleys of happiness and gratified feeling, and we voluntarily close our eyes to the storms which have flitted over them.

Thus, then, there is a heart-chill in the approach of the new year; it comes, like a stranger, from a far country; it has nor interest nor affinity with any; it has to create for itself sympathies, and ties, and affections; it brings with it new duties, and new prospects; its very freshness is forbidding; it is a blank page in the scroll of time, which is yet un-inscribed: and who shall trace his first characters upon the imperishable tablet without anxiety? The rejoicings of its welcome are a mockery, for its bounties are yet unenjoyed, its blessings are yet untasted, and its task is still unperformed; it starts into being with the very expiring sigh of its predecessor, like the phoenix from its own ashes; the same shout serves to celebrate the exit of the old year and the entry of the new one,—there is no momentary lapse of time to reconcile us to the change: the well-tried bark of existence is engulfed in the ocean of oblivion, and the new one comes on, with expanded sails, and

gleaming keel: there is no space for wailing the wreck, when we are hurrying forward to celebrate the launch, and the very requiem of the lost vessel is the cheer which hails the appearance of its successor. Surely it is possible,—though the idea is, perhaps, an idle one, engendered by the fancy of an enthusiast,—that all these passing years are swept on by the hand of their Eternal Author, into that hidden place from whence will be drawn the ceaseless hoard of centuries, destined to form eternity; and that we shall live over again our sunny days, while those of storm and tumult will be withdrawn from the reckoning, and those of error blotted from the registry. Happy they, from whose sum of gladdened months this withdrawal is a small one; and who, in counting over the days and weeks of their earthly existence, may find pleasant memories in their renewal; and have a prouder tale to tell of past life, than he who, after a lengthened period of pilgrimage,

could find no meeter epitaph for his costly tomb, than the unimpressive words

“J’AI VECU !”

Such was the very lengthy, and somewhat melancholy soliloquy of Mortimer Eustace, as on the evening of a day of more than usual depression, he remembered how great and sad a change one short year had made in his habits, his pursuits, and his hopes. True, he could call the dark, dusty, dingy rooms which he inhabited, his own, for he had earned the means to make them so: he could look all whom he met in the face, for he was no man’s debtor; but the privilege to do this had cost him far more than, to a mind constituted like his, money could ever repay. He had become the drudge and hack of a laborious and unthankful profession, where his talents were making the fortune of his employer, but were barely sufficient to save himself from want; while the curse of unappreciated genius, and neglected powers, weighed heavily upon

his spirit. He rose from his chair, and strove to shake off the miserable depression, to which he felt that he should be unmanly to yield; and Eustace had the more reason to struggle against the incubus which was endeavouring to settle on his heart, when he remembered that, within an hour, he was expected in Prospect Place, Pimlico, at an evening party, given by Mrs. Pearson, the wife of the gentleman who had hitherto availed himself of the talents and necessities of Eustace, (far beyond what either of them had expected, when the "intimate friend" of Miss Clarissa Jobson introduced Mortimer to the Editor,) at as inconsiderable an expence to himself both of money and civility, as possible; it so chanced, however, that the eldest daughter of Mr. Pearson happening accidentally one morning to call at the office upon her papa, by some happy fate, caught a glimpse of the handsome Mr. Smithson, who had "done" the leading articles ever since the



paper had become so suddenly popular; and doubled, nay, trebled its sale. *Vene, vidi, vici*, said Cæsar—the two first Miss Pearson had done; the next was in abeyance. Certain, however, it was, that only a few days after the rencontre above named, Mrs. Pearson had a soirée, and Mr. Smithson received a note on pale blue satin paper, which, when he took it from the hands of Jenny, who brought it to his room, savoured frightfully of tallow, and which contained a neatly written invitation to the said soirée. Eustace was in no mood for folly or flirtation; but Mr. Pearson was at present his employer, the individual to whom he looked for bread, and he replied courteously and affirmatively.

It is no sinecure to walk from St. Martin's Lane to Pimlico at half-past seven o'clock in the evening, particularly when that peculiarly vexatious rain is falling, commonly called "drizzling," which seems to have been invented for no other purpose than to cover those who are

exposed to it in London, with the soot-flakes which it dislodges from chimneys and roofs, for the benefit of the passers-by. Now, if anything can well enhance the unpleasantness of this shower of blended damp and dirt, it is the fact of the luckless pedestrian being a man of extreme cleanliness, very limited income, and clad in his best coat; possessed only of a very small umbrella, and one pair of pumps. Such was the case with poor Eustace; who threaded his cheerless and uncomfortable way along Piccadilly, elbowed by a crowd of busy and boisterous passengers; detained at times by brilliant equipages bearing the bright and the beautiful to the dinner party, or the toilette; and embarrassed by dirty crossings, mendicant sweepers, and conflicting umbrellas.

Reader, do you know Prospect Place, Pimlico? It looks upon a brick wall to the front, while the houses of the parallel street dos-à-dos with it in the rear. However, prospect is a secondary consideration at eight o'clock in

the evening, particularly when it “drizzles;” and Eustace saw the door opened with considerable satisfaction. The smart liveried domestic who gave him ingress, he recognized at once as one of the porters of the newspaper establishment; by whose good offices he obtained the removal of sundry patches of discolouration which had marred the brightness of his pumps; secured the safety of his umbrella and hat—no trifling consideration to a man who had to walk from Pimlico to St. Martin’s Lane home again;—and was enabled to look, when he entered the drawing-room of Mrs. Pearson, as though he had, at all events, come in a coach!

The room was by no means full when he entered; and as soon as “the footman” had announced him, Mr. Pearson, in all the glory of a full-dressed head, and tight pantaloons, came forward; shook hands with him most graciously, and led him up to a lady in a cherry-coloured dress, and a white satin hat

and feathers, to whom he introduced him as "Mr. Smithson, the gentleman of whom he had spoken," and whom he presented to Eustace as Mrs. Pearson; then he handed him to the front of a sofa, where sat two young ladies, so extremely alike, that unless he had felt a very overwhelming interest in one of them, Eustace would not have known them apart for five minutes, had he not remarked that Miss Pearson wore a blue sash, and Miss Caroline a pink one; they were both pretty, both plump, and both conceited.

"I fear you must have had a very unpleasant drive, Mr. Smithson," said Miss Pearson condescendingly.

"I walked, madam."

"Walked!" and the two ladies glanced at his spotless pumps, and then at each other.

Mr. Pearson moved on: "Mr. Dickenson, allow me to introduce to your notice Mr. Smithson; you may remember my having mentioned him to you."

Mr. Dickenson bowed slightly, and stared rudely, but he did not utter a sentence; he only knew that "the young man" was a "reporter" to his friend Pearson's paper; he knew nothing about the "leading articles," and he would not condescend too far.

No wonder that Mr. Dickenson was somewhat tenacious on the score of his personal consequence: more particularly as he was just now beginning to be conscious of the crumbling away of the sand-pile on which he had been standing so long that he fancied he had secured his footing on a rock: we hate metaphor: therefore in plain parlance, Mr. Dickenson was the editor of a review which had won its way to public favour when literature was neither so general, nor so necessarily high-toned as it is in the present day. His moral and intellectual attributes were neither of them of so high an order as to bear the close scrutiny of contemporary and emulative journalists; and it was consequently no wonder, we re-



peat, that Mr. Dickenson was somewhat tenacious on the score of his personal consequence. He was scrupulously neat in his dress, and astonishingly voluble in his utterance; the young ladies looked upon him as an oracle; and accordingly he had a very high opinion of the discrimination of the young ladies. When he pleased, he was anecdotal, well-bred, and entertaining; and had he not unfortunately accustomed himself to submit his *fadaises* to the ordeal of public opinion, he might have passed through life with the reputation of being a very "nice," good-tempered, agreeable man, and a small wit.

The next gentleman whom they approached, made a step or two forward to meet them: he was very tall, and very thin, with a sharp nose, and a pair of gold spectacles; he smiled with the utmost suavity, and even extended his hand to Mortimer; "Mr. Brockendon, Mr. Smithson;" the gentlemen bowed, and entered into conversation at once. After a

minute or two had elapsed, Mr. Pearson began to fidget, he broke in upon their subject to remark that "it was a wet evening, and that he was afraid the Miss Lawsons from Islington would be frightened by the weather, as they only kept an open carriage, and really it was a great bore for people who had a conveyance of their own, to be obliged to pay coach-hire; in fact, coach-hire was a very heavy expence,—he found it so; and indeed, in consequence, had almost determined to set up something of the kind himself."

Mr. Brockendon listened with quiet contempt, and Eustace with polite indifference to this very edifying harangue; and they were just on the eve of having their renewed dialogue once more interrupted by a second tirade as erudite as the first, when a thundering rap, and a very audible announcement of "Mrs. and the three Miss Lawsons," summoned Mr. Pearson to the other end of the room.

"Pearson is nervous to-night"—drily re-

marked the tall gentleman with the spectacles.

"Indeed! I was not aware that he was subject to such attacks;" said Eustace, with perfect simplicity.

Mr. Brockendon looked steadily at him; and then gently laying his hand upon his arm, drew him into a recess; "Mr. Smithson," he said gravely, "do you really not understand me?"

"On my honour, sir, no;"—was the reply.

"And are you not aware that you will have the honour of paying for the threatened carriage?"

"Me, sir?" exclaimed Eustace in some trepidation; "impossible!—it is wholly out of my power!"

Mr. Brockendon laughed a short dry laugh, half amusement and half scorn: "Young gentleman," he said slowly, "pounds, shillings, and pence are not the only coins current in London: talent, sir, talent must fetch its

price; however much selfish and narrow-minded individuals may endeavour to hide it under a bushel for a time, to answer their own sordid purposes. I know all the secrets of the newspaper office, young gentleman: I know why the paper has increased its sale to a degree which is most sensibly felt in Prospect Place, Pimlico. Look around you; all that is paltry and unpretending in this very elaborate apartment in which we are now standing, is of most respectable antiquity; but look at the vases, and the bosses, at the rare engravings, and the china monstrosities of every denomination under heaven, which have gathered around the original appurtenances of the room, with the profusion, and with more than the rapidity of dust; look at the buhl clocks on or-molu brackets; the soft gleamings from alabaster lamps; and then tell me whether yonder lady in the cherry-coloured garment, looks as though she knew even the correct names of the costly trumpery with

which sudden good fortune has decorated her Pimlico mansion; or whether the varnish of the warehouse, and the touch of the manufacturer is not yet fresh upon all."

"Really, sir;"—commenced Eustace, looking very uncomfortable.

"I know all that you would say," interposed the tall gentleman; "you would ask, 'but how can all this possibly concern me?' and you would probably add to the question, a doubt of your own correctness in listening to the condemnation of the very gew-gaws appertaining to a gentleman to whom you are so deeply indebted;" he spoke scornfully, and a smile of withering contempt settled on his lips. "I will tell you how all this concerns you;" pursued the speaker more gravely; "since you were introduced to our worthy host, the journal which was then tottering to its fall, has become a property; you are, I imagine, already sufficiently initiated into the mysteries and technicalities of your profession, to comprehend the phrase."



Eustace bowed assent.

“ Well then, sir, I will explain to you how this occurred : the leading paragraphs of the paper became suddenly imbued with an energy of tone, a closeness of reasoning, and an elegance of language, utterly at variance with the namby-pamby, vacillating, unconclusive style of composition in which they had hitherto poured forth their tediousness on the public ; or, more properly speaking, on that very minute fraction of the public who still clung to the journal, either from habit, or from the hope that it would mend. Mr. Pearson politely sends me his paper, and consequently I read it ; I was myself struck, as others were, by the suddenness with which the lion had shaken the ass’s skin from his shoulders, and asserted his supremacy ; I made enquiries ; for I instantly acquitted Pearson of all share in this amendment, in his soi-disant capacity of Editor ; I knew the man ; I had probed every avenue of his brain and mind, and I felt at

once that he could no more have produced such specimens of sound thinking, deep reading, and conclusive and convincing argument, than he could, with the produce of his journal, have paid off the national debt. I was told that a tall, dark-eyed, melancholy-looking gentleman had been recently added to the establishment; but that he was merely engaged as a reporter, to supply a vacancy occasioned by the secession of a young man who had obtained a more lucrative employment. On this tall, dark-eyed, melancholy-looking gentleman, Mr. Spithson, my thoughts fastened at once; I pictured to myself an individual, suddenly cast on his own efforts for a livelihood;—I see your cheek flush, young sir, but I have taken an interest in you, I have determined to serve you; and it were well that we should understand each other thoroughly at once;—an individual, I say, probably an utter stranger in London; that mighty Babel, where if men's tongues do indeed articulate the same sounds,

their hearts speak very different languages ; I could fancy a happy home, quitted in the pursuit of fame and fortune ; the desolate feeling of a warm and sanguine heart, chilled by communion with sordid and selfish men, like the one in whose service you are frittering away your talents, sacrificing the best years of your manhood, and reaping a reward very inadequate to your deserts. Had I not ascertained that it was thus, believe me, I should never have availed myself, as I am now doing, of the privilege of some forty more years than you have yet spent in the world, to talk to you on so delicate a subject. I have been assured, that even though, (as you môst decidedly are, and have for some time been) the actual editor of the newspaper, you are at this moment receiving no other salary, than the pitiful one, for which you engaged yourself many months back, as a mere reporter ; I ask not from motives of impertinent curiosity if it be really so,

but I wish to hear it from your own lips ; Mr. Smithson, was my information correct ?”

“ Perfectly, sir,” replied Eustace.

A bitter frown gathered on the brow of Mr. Brockendon. “ Pitiful scoundrel !” he muttered between his closed teeth. “ Well, sir, I thank you for your candour ;” he continued, addressing his bewildered listener ; “ and now I have a proposition to make to you : I have a friend, who is at present in want of a sub-editor for a journal of the first respectability ; he is liberal, gentlemanly, and honest ; are you willing to undertake the office ?—but I will not urge you to-night ; there is my card, I dine at five ; if you are disengaged to-morrow, and will favour me with your company, we will talk further on the subject ; and now, leave me, for yonder is Miss Pearson looking as though she loathed me for my monopoly.”

## CHAPTER IX.

DURING the dialogue detailed in the last chapter, Mrs. Pearson's drawing-room had been gradually filling, and the metamorphosed porter was busily handing round tea and coffee, assisted and followed by a ruddy damsel, with a smart cap trimmed with ribbons more glowing than her cheeks, and hands which shamed both, bearing a second tray covered with cakes, biscuits, and bread-and-butter. The most audible words for some minutes were: "Do you take cream, ma'am?" "will you allow me to assist you?" and "pray, what quantity of sugar?" White gloves were drawn from fair hands, to display jewelled fingers; and white

handkerchiefs were, with affected indifference, but actual care, spread over best frocks, to preserve them from the contact of sweets and fluids. Miss Pearson senior had indeed, as Mr. Brockendon hinted, long been glancing rather impatiently towards the handsome Mr. Smithson, and wondering at his bad taste, in preferring the society of a tall thin man with a sharp nose, and gold spectacles, to that of a young lady with bright eyes, and ringlets; particularly when the young lady's mamma was the donor of the fête. As Eustace crossed the room to obey the bidding of Miss Pearson's glance, he had leisure and opportunity to look around him, and to take a view of the assembled guests; groupes were standing beside tables, overstrown with portfolios, books, and scattered engravings; scent-bottles of all possible shapes, filled with all imaginable perfumes; maps, and charts, inscribed on the margins to "the editor of the — newspaper;" and porcelain inkstands and wafer



trays, evidently more intended for shew than use. Others again were gathered together in little knots, the ladies talking of love and literature, and the gentlemen absorbed in political discussions; a select few were assembled round an upright piano, shining in all the glory of crimson silk and gilding, discoursing volubly on "the divine science." Miss Pearson herself was still seated on the sofa where Eustace had first seen her, but Miss Caroline had departed, and her place was occupied by one of the three Miss Lawson's; a young lady with a blue dress, red hair, and pinkish eyes. As neither of the fair ones wore flounces, there was room on the sofa for three; and after a smiling, and somewhat fluttered introduction to Miss Arabella Lawson, Eustace seated himself beside them.

"Pa' thought Mr. Brockendon had fallen in love with you, Mr. Smithson," said Mademoiselle, as she leaned gracefully back on the pillow, which she had displaced to accommo-

date Eustace; "and as he is no favorite of Pa's, he was by no means gratified at the circumstance; but as Ma' justly remarked, the old gentleman is such a talker, that he is glad of any one who will listen to him."

Eustace bowed his thanks for the implied compliment; he smiled too, for since his conversation with the said old gentleman, his heart was lightened of half its load: the voice of kindness was ever to him as the rushing of waters in the desert—it seemed to renew the energies of his nature.

"I am quite afraid of that Mr. Brocken-don;" simpered the glowing Arabella.

"Oh, dear me! afraid of him?" sneered her friend; "I should as soon think of being afraid of Pa';—there is nothing at all to be afraid of: do you think there is, Mr. Smithson?"

"Nothing whatever, I should conceive, madam;" replied Eustace, warily; he could have spoken more warmly, but he had already

learnt a lesson of distrust in the world's paths, and he forbore.

"Who is that tall young lady, in the white crape dress?" enquired Miss Lawson.

"That is a provincial actress, who is coming out at one of the minor theatres, and whom Pa' intends to patronize: she is to sing, or recite, or something, to-night, when people begin to get tired of each other."

"What is her name?"

"I really don't know;" replied the senior Miss Pearson, with affected consequence; "I declined an introduction; I am not partial to players."

After they had spent half-an-hour together, Miss Arabella Lawson and her friend voted Mr. Smithson a bore; he might do very well to report for a newspaper, but he was a sad drag in a drawing-room: did not give a single opinion on the guests, and was actually ignorant of the difference between a *tête à la giraffe* and a *coiffure à la chinoise*. After this,

there was no hope of him, so they nodded, signalled, and left him, arm-in-arm, to join a groupe, where a couple of young ladies, called by courtesy "poets," were giving their opinions of Lord Byron, Moore, Shelley, and a few more insignificant writers of the same class, with great pungency and point, to a set of very young men, who were afraid to talk themselves, and therefore delightfully qualified for listeners. Here Miss Pearson was at home, and all the readable and unreadable books of the nineteenth century were quoted from, and disposed of: Latin and Greek phrases were sported, often with very peculiar pronunciation,—but genius must be allowed to indulge its peculiarities;—and all was erudition and display, until Mr. Dickenson lounged towards the groupe, and then the talkers subsided into silence, and awaited the mystic words of the oracle.

Just at this moment a movement took place about the instrument, and Mr. Pearson hand-

ed the embryo-metropolitan actress to the music stool. She sang, loudly and energetically; and the ladies turned up their eyes, and looked sentimental; and the gentlemen clapped their hands, and cried "bravo!" and the fair vocalist faced the company, and made much such a curtsy as she would have done had she been standing at the foot of the stage-lights: and then Mr. Pearson flourished his white cambric pocket-handkerchief, and held two fingers gracefully towards the object of all this enthusiasm, and led her back to her seat. Next he made the tour of the room, and murmured a few words in an under-tone, and with peculiar emphasis, to all the "gentlemen connected with the press" who were present, and of course gracious replies were made on all hands, for Mr. Pearson was asking a favour in his own house, and his guests were looking forward to a good supper. In a few minutes the host sauntered up to the fair actress, and seating himself beside her, communicated some

piece of intelligence, which made her blush even through her rouge, and bow most gracefully and gratefully. No doubt she believed, poor thing! that all the "gentlemen of the press," whom she saw to-night in their best suits, and with their company faces, would remember on the night of her debüt at the "Queen's," or the "Coburg," that they had promised at the *soirée* of Mrs. Pearson to say something favourable of her first appearance. If she were so deluded by hope, however, her *soi-disant* patron was not: he had promised to exert his interest for her, and he had now done it,—consequently his conscience was at rest; and it remained for the votary of Thespis and Thalia to ascertain by experience the exact value of his influence. She sang again, and again the *cognoscenti*, and the *literati*, nodded and winked, and Mr. Pearson rubbed his hands, and smiled encouragingly to "the tall young lady in white crape," who helped so delightfully to amuse his guests; and then, by



way of encouragement, a party congregated about her, and talked of the wonderful powers of Mrs. Wood, Madame Vestris, Miss Romer, and Miss Sherreff; congratulating the public on the galaxy of talent which they possessed, and goodnaturedly contriving to make the person whom they were addressing, feel her own insignificance as keenly as possible.

While this scene was acting by the musical amateurs, Mr. Dickenson was busied in explaining to a very young, modest, and attentive auditor of the male sex, his own very great condescension in accepting and inserting in his journal, some half score columns of the said auditor's fugitive poetry,—“It was so desirable an introduction,—so undeniable an advantage.”—And the listener was bowing, and blushing, and expressing himself deeply obliged; and the young ladies and gentlemen who stood by, were applying all sorts of polite and pretty adjectives to the name of Dickenson;—while Eustace remembered that Mr.

Pearson had been equally kind and condescending in permitting him to write the leading articles of the — newspaper, doubtless with as amiable and disinterested a feeling as that which the specious journalist was displaying to the highly flattered young poet to whom he was speaking. Had not Mr. Brockendon given him a somewhat novel view of the subject, so smooth and silvery were the arguments to which he now listened, that he would inevitably have left the house, with a painfully heavy sense of obligation to Mr. Pearson, pressing upon his heart.

Eustace was aroused from these reflections by a slight bustle near the door, and saw Mrs. Pearson herself, all bows and smiles, welcoming with great apparent cordiality, a gentleman of about five-and-thirty years of age, somewhat carelessly dressed, with a countenance rather intellectual than handsome, and a figure which, had it not been for a slight bend in the shoulders, would have been strikingly fine. The

new, and somewhat tardy guest, bowed on his side, stiffly and almost condescendingly to the gracious hostess: declined coffee, and endeavoured to make his way to an opposite sofa: but this was not a feat of easy accomplishment; bows and smiles, as continuous, and more numerous than those which he had encountered on his first appearance, assailed him on all sides; hands were extended, which he touched and relinquished; heads were bent, to which he bowed his own; and congratulations were uttered on his good looks, and improved health, to which he gave short and apathetic answers. Meanwhile a buzz of "Who is he?"—"who is he?" ran through the younger portion of the guests, and every eye was turned either in curiosity or recognition on the new arrival.—The secret was soon known to all. Eustace appealed to Mr. Brockendon.

"That pale, bent, taciturn man," was the reply; "is well known to you by name. It is Norton, the novelist: he is now in the zenith of

his popularity—‘the observed of all observers.’—I have been intimately acquainted with him for years; amiable as he is at heart, he is rendered almost misanthropical by the fulsome and ill-judged adulation which he meets with on all sides, among a certain set of would-be-literateurs, and pedantic blue-stockings: he is too proud and high-minded to be flattered into vanity, and he is consequently irritated into disgust. He will require forty drops of laudanum on his arrival at home to-night, to counteract the effect of the bows and bravoës (I speak figuratively, of course,) of Mrs. Pearson’s coterie. He is a man of superlative conversational powers, but I will venture to affirm that from this moment to the one in which he quits the house, he will give utterance to none but the most common-place sentences; because he is fully aware that every remark will be remembered, and canvassed, and quoted among the witlings by whom we are now elbowed. You must remember the fairy tale of the two sisters,



one of whom had the gift, when she spoke, of scattering diamonds and pearls, and the other toads and serpents? my friend Norton is so well aware that his auditors are anxiously waiting round him to collect the jewels, that he seldom opens his mouth, lest they should exclaim, on discovering that at times they gather up mere paste instead of gems;—or, to bring the simile nearer home; you may have heard Mathews, in his own inimitable manner, relate the anecdote of a little girl, at a party to which he was once invited, who stole to the back of his chair, and whispered in his ear: ‘Mr. Mathews, grandmamma hopes you’ll be funny to-night!’—you will have no difficulty in understanding the effect of such a communication: it sufficed to shut the mouth of the party addressed for the evening. Poor Norton, when he finds himself in the same situation, acts with the same wisdom, and from the same feeling,—he holds his tongue. But did you meet him when the author merges into the

man—when he is *himself*,—(and, if you have any curiosity, young gentleman, you shall shortly do so,) then you would allow that were he more known, the popular novelist would be far less attractive than the well-bred and well-principled gentleman. He is not finically foppish like one of the craft whom I could name, who wishes not to be suspected of the high crime and misdemeanour of knowing the savour of vegetables, or the complexion of beer; neither is he so utterly or affectedly underbred as another, who helps himself from the dish with his fork, and from the salt-cellar with his knife, when noble and courtly eyes are on him; he affects neither of these extremes; such puerile conceits are wholly beneath a nature like his. But you asked a name, and I have given you a sermon: age is proverbially garrulous, Mr. Smithson; and you will, I am sure, bear with me, when I merely exert the privilege of my standing in the world.”



Eustace assured him with truth that he was grateful to him for the insight which he had gained into the character of so popular a person as Mr. Norton.

Their dialogue was interrupted by a movement to the supper-room, and when Eustace had handed "the tall lady in white crape" to a seat, he remarked that the interesting person of whom he had just been conversing with Mr. Brockendon, had profited by the opportunity to escape.

## CHAPTER X.

“ To deny purgatory, is to deny experience ;” says a lively French writer ; “ there are many social purgatories ; I will shew you two or three at your leisure ; and to begin ”——

And to begin, reader, what think you of the social purgatory of what are technically designated “ Morning Calls ?” We do not mean pleasant, dreamy drives from door to door, where a thundering rap from the experienced hand of your footman, and a visiting ticket from your own, exempt you from the listlessness and ennui of the tedious ten minutes of an actual entrance. No, we speak of the unmeaning and unsatisfactory personal

“ call;” and there is surely no species of visiting of which the irksomeness clings to you so long and so wearily : you pass in an instant from sunshine and fresh air, to a close apartment, suffocating with perfumes, and darkened by closed curtains or drawn blinds, as though sickness and suffering had usurped the place of cheerfulness and health ; from the laughing gaity of nature, to the chilling retenu of a hostess, lethargized by the effects of the previous night’s dissipation, her thoughts probably wandering to that which is to come ; your own spirits are instantaneously and involuntarily chilled ; and you sink on a chair or a sofa with a dead weight at your heart. What ensues ? Dull discussions on the weather, the lion, the last fashion, or the new novel, as best suits the mood and temper of the assembled party. Much necessarily depends on your hostess : some ladies think it necessary to put on languor with their morning robes ; and these are the most insufferable of all miscalled

*entertainers!* Who has not the misfortune to be acquainted with one of these? women, who like a bad watch, require good winding-up, and when they are wound up, will not go. This is one system of social penance, enhanced perhaps by a thorough draught of air just in the direction of your fakir-like seat, where you are performing an ostensibly-voluntary act of self-torture; breathing perhaps a close and sickening atmosphere, redolent of forced perfumes, or the still more unwholesome scent of half-withered flowers compressed into foreign vases and china corbeilles. But even this is more tolerable than to attend the morning orgies of some animated female "hue and cry," for stray characters and connexions, properties and propensities. It is a common jest that the fumes of souchong and bohea disseminate scandal like the plague-wind; and yet perhaps not one tithe of the illiberality was ever uttered over a tea-table, that has been breathed by fair lips, ay, and mustachioed and manly

ones moreover, in a crowded drawing-room, thronged with morning loungers. There is a listlessness, a desire of excitement, which must be satisfied; the orgies of the past night have left their tedium behind; every object which promises the pastime of a moment is seized upon with avidity; the dangler sneers a second to the ridicule of his mistress; and the beauty laughs out the heart's scorn when the finger of her admirer points at the victim: a word, a look, a tone, like a spark cast on straw, kindles the incipient flame; and the game is started, and run down, and every one seems to hold it a point of honour to be "in at the death!" Smiles and jests are bandied with the most perfect good breeding; and meanwhile, the unfortunate victims of those smiles and jests, are dispossessed of every good quality under heaven, though they may in reality boast many of them, with a velocity and detail which would not disgrace a steam process!

This digression brings us back to that which we were well nigh forgetting: Lady Blackley's morning room: with its pink silk curtains drawn closely across the windows to exclude the gay sunshine which would willingly have shed its beams into the apartment; its many sofas and lounges, the very embodiments of luxury and expence; its *recherché* gauds, at once beautiful and useless; its costly confusion, and studied disarray; and above all, the Countess herself in a cap of Maradin's unequalled invention, her hand resting on the uncut copy of a metaphysical work, and her eyes wandering from the face of her niece, who sat opposite to her, to the other loungers who thronged this, the only uninvaded apartment of her splendid mansion. Her ladyship's thoughts were with Weippart, Gunter, and Maradin; but she scorned to let this be suspected, and accordingly appeared absorbed in the conversation which was proceeding around her. Lady Clara Ashburnham, was, to use a



homely but very expressive phrase, perfectly "at home;" for with the exception of the Dowager Marchioness of Farrington, who had been deaf for the last twenty years, and only made morning visits from habit, all the persons collected in her aunt's well-ordered and very becoming apartment, on the present occasion were gentlemen; some of whom were bidden to the ball of the following night, and others who hoped to be so ere they left the house. Lady Farrington was busied with the *Court Journal*, and Lady Clara felt that she herself was looking her very best; and moreover the Honorable Morton Mowbrey was at her side. Who has not heard of Morton Mowbrey?—the gay, the handsome, the well-dressed Morton Mowbrey; the best rider, the best rower, and the best hunter at Oxford; the highest better at Ascot and Newmarket; the most finished waltzer at Almack's, the—no, not the best scholar, nor the greatest wit in London,—but a man cannot be every thing,

and it is surely something to be able to ride, row, hunt, bet, and waltz ; and all these things the Honorable Morton Mowbrey did to perfection.

“ And is Ella Jernington really such a beauty ? ” smilingly demanded Lady Clara, as she exhibited on the extreme edge of an Asiatic ottoman just as much of a well-turned ancle as bienséance permitted ; “ is she really so very, so pre-eminently resistless ? ”

“ Pretty enough to please ; ” carelessly responded the gentleman : he replied almost in a whisper, for the Honorable Morton Mowbrey never spoke above his breath when he addressed a lady ; “ and she is modest, and retiring ; never utters a sentence without blushing, and never blushes without reminding one of a treatise on—pshaw ! ”

“ Poor Morton ! he is always posed by a treatise, and a pamphlet gives him the spleen ; ” said a loungee who had overheard Mowbrey’s closing sentence ; “ an octavo has been known

to produce an ague-fit, and it is believed that a quarto would be his destruction."

"Lovell, for mercy's sake, forbear;" cried Lady Clara; "I have a thousand questions to ask of Mowbrey, and not a moment to spare to your bitter little pleasantries; they are like olives: good provocatives, but bad cheer of themselves; when I have a surfeit of amiability, your sauce piquante is delicious; but to-day"——

"You patronize sentiment, and loathe satire:—well, be it so; I am dumb. And so onward, Mowbrey, to the dissection of fashion's new favorite, Miss Jernington. You paused, if I remember rightly, at a treatise"——

"Insufferable!" half articulated Lady Clara. "And what more of this paragon, Morton? does she play?—sing?"——

"One and both," replied her companion; "and each in bad time, tune, and taste. No style, no tact; all raw and unfinished."

"C'a sent la campagne, n'est-ce-pas?" murmured the lady contemptuously.

"Frightfully;" responded the gentleman with a shrug, fixing his eye steadily on the little foot which rested on the ottoman.

"Dance?" again demanded the querist, acting on the hint.

"En paysanne!"

"Is she blue?"

"Awfully! she blushed herself into an abstruse discussion on style, and hinted something about a knowledge of Murray."

"Better and better!" exclaimed Lovell; she not only blindfolds Morton with an abstruse discussion, but feeling for him in the main, like a gentle and well-behaved young lady, recommends his cultivating an acquaintance with Lindley Murray."

"And next," pursued Mowbrey, disregarding the interruption, "she digressed to Leigh Hunt."

"Monstrous!" ejaculated the tormentor; "talk of Hunt! a young lady offend the noble ears of the Honorable Morton Mowbrey, of Castle Mowbrey, by insinuating that he uses blacking, and initiates his household into the mysteries of roasted corn—monstrum horrendum!"

"I'm glad she's blue, however;" drawled Lady Clara: "that is, if she don't write novels, and put one into them; I never could endure the idea of being introduced into a three-volumed work, boarded, and published to the world at large by Messieurs Colburn and Bentley, or some other fashionable bookseller. Perhaps she'll contribute to the annuals, and write a sonnet now and then for the Court Journal: we wanted a new style in our party. Ah, Mowbrey! we lost a good rallying point when Mrs. Pretinta Pelette went to study draping in Florence."

"It was pretty evident that she never studied it in England," interposed Lovell; "she



was always too classical for my common-place ideas: a degree too much à l'antique; but all doubtless 'in keeping.' I only hope that she will return to us à la mummy, enveloped from ankle to chin, to exhibit the force of contrast."

"I always imagined that she was a great favourite of yours, Mr. Lovell:" said the lady, with a slight frown.

"As a study, par excellence, certainly: I always looked on her professionally, and confess myself a great admirer, en artiste, of her Venusian scarf of gauze, made of woven cobwebs, and tinted with the dust of a butterfly's wing: so pretty, and particular, and pictorial; no dark, deep, dense shades, but all light, and airy, and intelligible. Yes, Lady Clara, we did indeed lose a rallying point when Mrs. Pelette left us."

"That was an unfortunate affair of poor Sir Harry Lysander," said Lady Clara, as if anxious to change the conversation; "it was a horrid bore their pinning that under-bred



Miss Argenton to his marriage certificate, and then insisting on his rustivating at Argenton Hall for two years; poor soul! how is he to get through four-and-twenty months of solitude?"

"Not absolute solitude;" whispered Mowbrey: "you forget his bride."

"And his dogs,"—added Henry Turfover, a sporting cousin of Lovell's.

"And his rooks;" concluded Lovell himself: "and he may, for aught we know, turn Irving-ite, and cultivate a taste for cawing concerts; how pretty and rural!"

"The rurality of Sir Harry Lysander!" echoed Lady Clara, with an affected laugh: "of a man born in Pall Mall, educated in Bond Street and St. James's, and who never during the season breathed any air more fresh than that of the Green Park—ridiculous!"

"Your ladyship was cruel there"—murmured Morton.

"Pshaw!" said the lady, bending her eyes

on one of Melnotte's kid slippers; "Sir Harry was a mere butterfly."

"Pauverino!" cried Lovell; "to be torn from your divine ladyship, to rusticate with horses and 'squires: to listen to bad sermons from the village parson, and to drink bad beer with the tenants, faugh!—to exchange the fascinations of Lady Clara Ashburnham for the orations of Lady Lysander; to degenerate from a single man about town to a married man in the country; to be reminded once every three days that his wife paid all his gambling debts, and that he is spending her money;—what a delicious revolution."

"Delicious indeed!" pursued the lady, excited into all the interest which was excitable in her fashion-seared character: "for it is well known that Miss Argenton is, by fourteen years, the senior of Sir Harry:—a complete emancipated old maid, and penurious to a proverb! Has the family coach stuffed into a brown holland case, and the wheels wrapped

with hay-bands; never winds up her watch for fear of wearing out the works, and keeps her maid employed in cleaning her soiled gloves!"

"De mieux en mieux!" laughed Lovell; "walks twice to church on a Sunday, and makes Sir Harry carry her pattens!"

"Alas, poor Hal! and is it come to this?" declaimed Mowbrey fantastically; "but, perhaps, the lady is pretty,—accomplished,"—

"To a marvel!" responded Lovell; "nature sketched Miss Argenton's humanity on the canvas of existence with ochre and chalks:—all is coarse, broad, and flaunting; no neutral tints, by my philosophy; all palpable enough;—then for her accomplishments: she beats the keys of the piano, and drags the unlucky chords of an old family harp, which is a sort of heir-loom in the house of Argenton, with a key that don't fit, and two broken pedals; and paints! She has executed a mythological piece in water-colours:

old Argenton the stock-broker, as the mighty Jove, with a silver prize cup in one hand, and a thunder-bolt in the other; and herself, blooming in sky-blue drapery, as his cup-bearer."

"Exquisite!" smiled Lady Clara; "Sir Harry must enshrine the bijou in his dressing-room. But, Mowbrey, what became of De la Fine, the French count?"

"He is studying the humanities at Vienna."

"Supplying deficiencies, like your 'rallying point' Mrs. Pelette, Lady Clara," interposed the remorseless Lovell; "for my part, I always expected that he would have had Mr. Martin of Galway at his levee some morning, to expostulate with him on the monstrosity of his proceedings; why, I am told, though I will not vouch for the veracity of my informant, that he contracted for all the game-cocks in the county of Kent; worried sixteen cats one week, and killed three hunters in attempting to clear the outer wall of

the King's Bench,—a notable feat by the way; I'd bid a cool thousand for such a bit of horse-flesh myself, Turfover."

"I'd double your bidding, sir;" replied the young sportsman gaily: "and, at this moment, I might venture to risk even a little more than that; for to tell you the truth, fortune and I are just now neck and neck, and 'twill be a hard race, if my old father does not clear the course for me."

Lovell laughed.

"Pray, Mr. Lovell," said Lady Clara, as she saw that her aunt was about to speak, and dreaded a sermon extended *ad libitum*, on the sin of sons wishing their fathers quietly removed to the next world; "tell me the fate of that six-weeks phoenix, Mr. Honorius Spencer Grenville, 'the man with the name,' as the witty Sir John Gray used to designate him. I remember that seventeen of the Misses Hughson were in love with him, at the same time when thirty-five more of them were



laying siege to yourself, Mowbrey, and Ly-sander."

"Ha! ha! excellent!" exclaimed her companion; "I find your ladyship is as well skilled in multiplication as in subtraction: nay, never frown, Lady Clara; but you have truly pictured a goodly groupe! As for Grenville, his race was soon run; it would not do; no fashion; all raw cash; no connexion,—a sort of park-paling personage, something between the gentleman and the commoner; wretched spec', his town trip, for I hear that he makes a figure in the country. All your county men should vegetate in their own soil, flourish and grow up green like the tops of their own turnips, and make speeches to the corporations of their own parishes: they are sure to be jostled into their real insignificance if they leave home. I fancy Grenville learnt that lesson before he emigrated to the wilderness of his estate; tried the House too, but that failed; and, as a climax to his misfortunes, was re-



fused Almack's, and quizzed by your ladyship."

"And poor Miss Almeria Hughson, who christened him the Belvidere, how did she support his retreat?" demanded the lady.

"With all the philosophy of a town belle: she stayed at home once or twice on Opera nights, forswore rouge for a fortnight, and finally languished herself into the heart of a bilious, antiquated Indian nabob, who patronizes all the remaining fifty-one sisters mentioned by your ladyship."

"The very thing!" remarked Lady Clara; "so now poor, good Mrs. Hughson may have a quiet rubber, without being so incessantly on the look out for her sweet girls:—husband-hunting for nine daughters must truly have been the very reverse of a sinecure."

"Mrs. Lavengen was a charming woman;" said Mowbrey; "their widowed aunt who spent the season with them before Almeria's marriage."

"I never could admire;" coldly remarked Lady Clara, as she pressed back her own ringlets smoothly from her forehead: "by the way, it may be a weakness, but I never could admire a woman with red hair."

"And green eyes;" pursued Lovell; "people, to be sure, were kind enough to call her hair auburn, and her eyes blue; but both your ladyship and myself have seen her, and are consequently fully competent to judge; your ladyship's carriage, if I mistake not, once passed near that of Mrs. Lavengen at the Park gate; and I had a fifty-yard perspective of her in the crush-room, at the conclusion of a thronged representation of *La Somnambule*;—I always like to be enabled to judge for myself."

The cheek of the lady crimsoned slightly, and there was a momentary compression of the lip, and contraction of the brow; but it was too late for vengeance: Lovell had already received his ticket for Lady Blacksley's Assem-

bly ; nay, the Countess would as soon have dispensed with her new argand lamp, as with Lionel Lovell, even had it been otherwise. As the recollection crossed Lady Clara's mind, and ere the cloud had quite passed away from her countenance, her tormentor had started a new victim.

“ *Apropos de sages*, your ladyship said something about poor Sir John Gray being a wit ; too bad, by mine inheritance ! I remember his one day asking me whether the tunnel under the Thames was not intended for the fish to suck the water through, to prevent their imbibing the mud.”

“ Fie !—fie !—you are poetical in your prose, Lovell :” said Morton Mowbrey.

“ Nay, if you doubt it, how will you credit the fact of his having had it in contemplation to erect a factory for the manufacture of sponge ; which he assured me, he had been told in confidence was composed of woollen rags ? But I will spare the wit, Lady Clara ; it

suffices that you have pronounced him such."

"I am but the world's echo; at Lady Lionton's soirée he was shewn up as a male blue."

"And did Lady Clara Ashburnham really not unkennel the fox?" demanded Henry Turf-over.

"No, for at least he had wit enough to play his part to admiration: he said little, smiled less, looked absent, beat bad time to the band, and worked his way through the whole of his hostess's album."

"Bravo, Sir John!" cried Lovell, "I would have signed away twenty broad acres only to have seen him for five minutes."

"What a bore is his helpmate!" said Lady Clara with a pretty shudder; "a little shivering, nervous, hypochondriacal beauty, buried in Indian shawls, and drowned in volatile essences; always thinking of prescriptions, calling in physicians, living on drugs, and talking of her husband!"

At this moment, an attendant whose tread and tones were soft and silvery enough for a courtier, announced the arrival of Lady Clara's carriage: old Lady Farrington let fall her eyeglass, and looked at her watch: Lady Blackslley nodded her adieu, and continued the sotto voce communication with which she was favoring a young guardsman, and which had already extended to a formidable length; while Lovell instantly requested to be allowed the privilege of handing her ladyship down stairs.

"I would not willingly tax your politeness;" was the cold reply, as the lady withdrew the hand which he had taken, and passing it through the arm of Mowbrey, carelessly bowed her parting to his friend.

"A plague on the green eyes!" muttered Lovell as they disappeared, "but she is neither young nor pretty enough pour boudier." And with this comfortable reflection, he shortly afterwards took his leave.



## CHAPTER XI.

ON the Surrey side of Westminster Bridge, and about two miles from town, on the right-hand side of the road, stood a very old, very dingy, and very dull red brick house. There was the affectation of a lawn and shrubbery, before, and on either side of it, and the ghost of a garden behind. The lawn terminated in a tall iron pallsading, and a heavy iron gate. A libel on a carriage-drive ran in a circle, making a round O of dusty-looking turf, just under the two windows which flanked the door of entrance, and producing very awkward-looking corners on the other side of the gravelled sweep, which was itself enriched by a



goodly crop of rank, waving grass, groundsel, and field-daisies. Curtains of dark green mo-reen fell in deep festoons over windows already obscured by dust and neglect; and bilious-leaved geraniums served to exclude from the lower panes, the little light which might have wished to intrude into the apartments wherein they barely made darkness visible. The room on the right-hand side of the entrance was dimly lighted by a small lamp of ground glass, on the evening of a cheerless day in April; a day which had been more prolific of tears than smiles, and was succeeded by an evening even more chilly than is usual in that month; a small, feeble, cheerless fire burned in the narrow grate, and beside it sat a venerable looking woman, dressed in the fashion of the last century, with sharp and strongly-defined features, which betokened more shrewdness than amiability. In her hand she held a carved tortoise-shell snuff box, and a huge ball of knitting worsted; and her eyes were steadily,

and somewhat sternly fixed on a portrait which hung before her. It was that of a young and very handsome woman: a face of melancholy beauty, such as the fancy sometimes engenders in our dreams: a loveliness which tells of the heart's sorrow, and wins pity while it challenges admiration. Now, it perhaps struck more sadly on the eye than when it first left the easel of the artist, for it was slightly embrowned by smoke, and looked as though the spirit of the place had breathed upon it, and deepened its shades. The room had another occupant: a young girl of eighteen, who was seated close beside the lamp, busily employed on a piece of rich and elaborate embroidery. Her long dark hair fell over her face as she leant above her task, plying her needle with a precision and steadiness worthy of a more mature age. They sat for a time in silence, a long time; and during the whole of it, the eyes of the matron did not move from the portrait, nor those of her companion stray from the

cambric. There was a gloom, a cheerlessness in the whole apartment, which had in it something inexpressibly depressing: the heavy, high-backed chairs, the clumsy, inconvenient table, the narrow sideboard on which stood a silent time-piece, with a huge family Bible beside it, all were of mahogany, perfectly blackened by time. At intervals a few cinders fell through the grate, and each started at the sound, but as instantly relapsed into their former attitude of absorption. At length the glance of the elder lady was withdrawn from the fair face which she had so long been contemplating, and she spoke in a low, subdued tone which suited well with the melancholy of the scene and hour; her words appeared to cost her an effort, and she uttered them slowly and thoughtfully, like one who had pondered long ere she resolved to break the silence of the place.

"Agnes Davenel;" she said, and the young girl raised her head, shook back the long

curls from her forehead, and turned towards her. Surely she was—and yet it could not be—the original of the picture; there was the same large, dark, melancholy eye, the same delicate outline, the same straight Grecian nose, and exquisitely cut mouth; but the female in the portrait was her senior in years, and, perhaps, slightly her inferior in beauty.

“Agnes Davenel, will your task be completed at the appointed time?”

“I fear to trust myself with the question, madam; and I have yet two days.”

“Two days!” echoed the matron sadly; “and perhaps, Agnes, the garment on which you are exhausting your time, your patience, and what is of infinitely more value to you than either, your precious eyesight, may be worn but as many hours. Agnes, it is hard, very hard, that these things should be.”

“And yet,” murmured the maiden, “so high a remuneration may well reconcile me to the exertion which the work demands;

you know, madam, I am promised payment on its delivery."

The old lady sighed.

"It must surely be a wedding garment;" pursued the speaker with a sweet smile: "for I cannot otherwise reconcile to myself the anxious interest which was taken in its beauty by the fair creature for whom it is intended: so lively were her inquiries, so animated and numerous her suggestions, that I almost became imbued with a portion of the same spirit; and I felt while I returned homeward as though the work would have been but an hour's task."

"Agnes, my child, you talk like one who knows indeed but little of the frivolity of your sex; you have yet to learn that the shape, and colour, and fashion of a dress, can be made a subject of happiness, or a theme of discontent; it is well that you know nothing of these things; for, my poor girl, you have few of them on which to speculate: it may indeed, as you say, be a marriage garment, on which you

are exerting the industry to which I am little less indebted than yourself, and it were well that it should be so, for the next raiment which you may be called upon to prepare will probably be a shroud."

"My dear madam!" Agnes laid her work upon the table, and looked anxiously at her companion.

"Yes, Agnes;" pursued the matron: "I feel that this world and I have little left in common, and that we shall soon part company: do not look so deprecatingly on me, my child; my pilgrimage on earth has been a long and a weary one; I would not give up one atom of the affection which is yet left to me, to gain years of existence. For myself, I shall rejoice to lay down my burthen, and be at rest; but when I think of you, Agnes: of your youth, your destitution,—of the million wants, and difficulties, and snares of the world; then, indeed, bitter as the closing years of my existence have been, I



could yet almost wish them prolonged. But I am wrong to talk thus, Agnes; I trust that there is yet one left to you on earth, who will cherish you with all the love that I have felt, and with twenty-fold the power which I have possessed to make that love valuable."

"None can ever be so valuable to me on earth!" murmured the fair girl; she spoke slowly and sadly, for her heart was wrung.

"I thank you from my soul, Agnes;—my own poor, orphan child! I have owed you more tenderness than it has been in my nature to bestow. Some day I shall relieve my heart, and tell you a tale: And wherefore not now? I may be wrong to defer it, even for an hour; my years, and my miseries, should have taught me never to delay until the morrow that which may be done ere the sun has set. Cast aside that task of vanity, Agnes; your eye must be fixed on the sweet, sad portrait of your mother, for it is of her that I am about to speak,

—of my fair and martyred child, my sainted Ellen. Well is it that there is another world where all is blessedness—well, both for the broken-hearted one, and for those who let her die unforgiven and unwept.”

“ And did she indeed so die ?” demanded Agnes, looking up from the low stool on which she had seated herself at the feet of her grandmother.

“ She did !” said the old lady hoarsely ; “ she, an only child, a fair girl, beautiful and gentle : breathing nothing but peace and tenderness ; innocent and lovely ; but it is not thus that I must commence my task. Agnes, extinguish the lamp ; if I am the cause of wasted time to you, my child, it is all that we can afford to waste ; and my words will reach your heart as easily by the flickering fire-light, as by the glare of torches. To me, the pang of giving them utterance will be lessened, for as I have thought of these things in the night-watches, when you have been sleeping the

deep sleep of innocence beside me, I have sometimes felt as though to the darkness I was indebted for the preservation of my reason. Life has a thousand trials, which the world pours forth from the phial of its bitterness, unrelentingly and lavishly ; the cares of earth fall heavily upon the spirit, and crush it : but, save for one evil only, all have their remedy : we may recover from sickness ; we may retrieve our broken fortunes ; we may learn to dry our tears when death has swept away our loved ones ; we may spurn the contempt of the haughty, and smile at the contumely of the proud ; but there is one arrow, which, when it has been driven into the heart, can never be again drawn forth : its point is poisoned, its iron corroded, its shaft unfeathered, and from this there is no escape ; Agnes, it is in mine ; the barbed arrow of self-reproach !—day and night it withers me : it looks in with the light through my narrow window, and it is seated in the darkness by my poverty-steeped hearth ;

it has a voice in the silence, and I hear its ceaseless tauntings in the laughter of the crowded streets. Surely it is branded on my brow, for to me every stranger-eye appears to see it written there."

"Madam—Mrs. Sydenham;" almost shrieked Agnes, terrified at the rigidity which was stealing over the features of her companion.

"Agnes, bear with me," said the matron: "the memories of the past are to my heart like the night-mare to a sleeper: they weigh me down, and subdue me; I cannot shake off their baneful influence, but I can contend with it; I can, and I will, my child; reach me yon glass of water; after all which I have endured, all which I still endure, I must not shrink from this trial."

Agnes rose, and with a trembling hand placed the glass within reach of her excited relative, and then seating herself again at the feet of the old lady, she shook back her raven curls, and with a beating heart, awaited the promised narrative.

## CHAPTER XII.

“ AGNES, when I married your grandfather, Horace Sydenham, he was one of the first merchants in the City of London. We commenced life with high hopes, devoted hearts, and a splendid income. There was not a cloud on our worldly horizon, not a dread of evil to darken our spirits. My husband was a man of prepossessing manners, handsome exterior, and high-breeding: for myself, I shall only say, that he saw and loved me before he knew that I could add anything to his princely fortune, and that doubtless he loved me not the less that I brought a large increase to our worldly means. Not a wish to which

in the recklessness and buoyancy of my heart, I gave utterance, but was granted almost as soon as it was formed : I could not imagine wretchedness, for I had never seen it ; and as for poverty, though I often read, and sometimes heard of it, I never learnt to comprehend in those unreflecting and heedless years of profusion and excess, its real nature, and its possible extent ; like the French Princess, who wondered how people could be fools enough to die of famine, and declared that she herself would live upon bread and vegetables rather than do so ; if I ever thought for five consecutive minutes on the subject, it was to feel astonishment that they did not make better arrangements than to be in want of money ; and if the case came within my own power, to send them whatever sum I chanced to have about me, with a cold counsel to be more judicious in future. Agnes, my child, should it ever be in your power and, (for the ways of Providence are inscrutable ;) who shall



venture to say that such shall never be? should it ever be in your power to stretch out a helping hand to the famishing and the needy, in that hour remember that the mere casting from you of that which you do not miss, and of which you know not the value, does not constitute charity; and that there are times when a soft word and a kind smile give more comfort to the soul, than lavished gold can purchase for the body. In my youth, I was ignorant of this; you, I feel and know, have long been aware that kindness, even where there is nothing more tangible to bestow, can call forth the blessings of the afflicted. May they be answered on your head, my fair girl; for no word, save in gentleness, has ever yet issued from your lips! But I digress; I cling like a frightened child, to all which may delay the punishment that my own faults have entailed on me. I became a mother: I shall pass lightly over the rapture with which I placed my infant Horace in the arms of his

father; I cannot bear the retrospect; for in a few short months I had no longer a son.—” the old lady paused for a moment, and then continued dejectedly—“Then, Agnes, in that trial, I felt for the first time that there were sorrows from which gold could not purchase exemption; that there was anguish which laughed luxury to scorn, and banquetted with pomp; it was a bitter lesson, and one which I did not forget. I had never seen death before; cold, uncompromising, relentless death: in vain I screamed to my boy in my unrighteous pride of heart, in my impious unbendingness of spirit; he answered me no more; I pressed his cold lips, and clasped his nerveless hands, but he returned not my caress; the grave had claimed my boy, my only one; and I was long ere I bent humbly to the dispensation of that Mighty Power which had recalled him to itself. Again and again was I a parent; and yet, in the tenth year of my wedded life, I was still childless. But I had learnt to bow to the

stroke, if not without deep and painful suffering, at least without wild and unholy violence; and Heaven, satisfied with my submission, at length spared to me in its mercy a cherub girl; little dreamt I, when she nestled on my heart, and my arms were folded about her, that I should myself be her destroyer!"

There was the silence of a moment; and then Mrs. Sydenham put her lips to the water which Agnes held towards her, and after a struggle, resumed her narrative. "She brightened in beauty as she grew in years: we loved her with a surpassing love; and she was affectionate as she was beautiful. To a manner gentle and subdued, she joined talents and aptitude beyond our most sanguine hopes. When she had reached her twelfth year, the axe was laid to the root of our prosperity; a wide and weighty speculation, in which my husband had engaged, utterly failed. We sank under the blow for a time, but at length we awoke from our lethargy of sorrow, and looked

steadily on the evil which had overtaken us. We were stunned, but not smitten : we had yet enough for comfort,—we had yet our child—and we felt that we owed it to her to make new efforts to win back fortune to our threshold. We did strive, Agnes ; by night we devised, and by day we acted ; but Sydenham wasted beneath the trial. Too soon I saw that he had lost the searchingness of intellect, and the steadiness of purpose, which in him had been peculiarly marked ; he talked at times almost incoherently, and chid me for what he called my parsimonious tendency ; and at others he wept like a child, and told me that he had a presentiment of ruin and disgrace. In vain I reasoned with him during those paroxysms of depression ; in vain I insisted that the idea of ruin was an idle phantom of his own overcharged brain, and that disgrace was impossible to a man of his organization and principles ; the feeling sat like an incubus on his spirit, and he withered beneath its influence. At

length the bolt fell: one day he complained of weariness, and threw himself on a sofa; I caused the room to be darkened, and laid a light covering over his face: and with Ellen beside me, I seated myself at the far corner of the apartment; we sat there long and silently; and then, with hearts lightened by the refreshing promise of his quiet sleep, we conversed gently in whispers, lest we should awaken him.—Agnes,”—continued the old lady in an abrupt and startling tone; “we might have shouted in his ear the words we had to utter: we might have shrieked out our hopes and our fears aloud, and we could not have broken his rest—he slept the sleep from which none awaken in this world—the slumber which is dreamless—he was dead!

“Time has thrown a softening veil over the agonies of that period:” continued Mrs Sydenham, after a brief silence; “which I dare not farther raise. I hoped,—I believe I was even impious enough to *pray*, that I might not sur-



vive the blow ; but my prayer was an unholy one, and in mercy remained unanswered ; for in my selfish sorrow I had forgotten the orphan girl whom I should have left alone and unprotected,—sometimes I think,” pursued the childless mother ; “ that the world would have been less cruel than myself ; that it would have spared to her the suffering which I inflicted, and delayed the death which in my hardness of heart I was the means of hastening ! Agnes, when the fate of your grandfather became known, we were not left to solitary grief—we were the centre of a crowd—I see you smile through your tears, my child, but you misconceive my meaning, from the bitter garb in which I have clothed it : we *were* the centre of a crowd—a crowd of claimants, all clamorous and uncompromising—but why do I talk of uncompromising ? with whom, or for what were they to compromise ? with two ruined, heart-broken women—a widow, and an orphan. I gave them all we had, Agnes, save the Bible



which is beside you, and a miniature portrait of my husband: they valued neither the one, nor the other; but to me they were precious beyond all price! I sat in the midst of my devastated home, with Ellen beside me, and never shed a tear. When they had taken all we had, they left us to our sorrows; but even then I did not weep; I looked up to my child with a bursting heart, and bade her hope.—I said it in the bitterness of my soul, and I was rebuked by her innocent and unsuspecting reply. She taught me, by the mild and earnest piety of her answer, that even then we were not beyond hope. I reminded her that we were penniless, and without a home; that the little property which had been left at her father's death, had been inadequate to repair the ravages which his last ruinous speculation had made in his affairs: how inadequate, we had already experienced! I detailed to her with the calm and unflinching precision of despair, every miserable minutiae of our situation—I told her that I

had not a connexion in England—that we had no friends, she already knew; for with our fallen fortunes, our acquaintance had deserted us—and yet, she smiled, and talked to me of a trust beyond this world; and finally roused me to exertion. I discovered by accident, that we had still one straw floating past us, to which to cling—the hope was indeed a feeble one, but, nevertheless, I grasped it with avidity. Your grandfather had, as a last effort, partly freighted a merchant vessel to the South Seas: it was a hazardous venture, but, like the desperate gamester, who perils all on his one remaining throw, my husband had risked every pound which he yet possessed in the world, and could strictly call his own, in this last speculation. Agnes, that vessel had been gone long, very long—months more than were needed for her voyage, and still no tidings had been heard of her; yet, in the extremity of my misery, I clung to this wild hope: I knelt and prayed, that, improbable of completion as it appeared

to our finite minds, it might yet be realized for my child's sake—my prayer was heard and answered. Ere many days had passed, I received a letter—the vessel had arrived: she had made a prosperous, although dangerous and tedious voyage, and we were no longer beggars.”

Agnes raised her large lustrous eyes to Heaven, and uttered a deep ejaculation of thanksgiving: to her excited feelings, the narrative had all the effect of passing events; and she almost seemed, at the moment, to have herself escaped from destitution and wretchedness.

“Though we were reserved from immediate want,” thus continued Mrs Sydenham; “we were, nevertheless, far from being insured from it; there were some few debts which had been contracted in the household, among a class of people ill-calculated to bear the loss which their non-payment would have entailed. Small sums individually, which, nevertheless collectively, drew heavily on my slender resources:

more important, because deeper involvements, I was unwillingly obliged to leave unremedied: for I did not possess sufficient funds to discharge them, even had I utterly beggared myself, and, what was more bitter still, my child. We had to seek a new home, and we found one, unpretending and humble, as best suited our altered fortunes: we were among strangers, but for a time we were every thing to each other; and we heeded not that we were coldly passed by in our quiet walks. Agnes, I approach rapidly to the most painful portion of my tale. I have said that for a time we were every thing to each other: and during that period, how often, as I remembered our former affluence, did I not look on the beautiful face of your mother, and in the vanity and weakness of my heart, build up an airy castle of future fortune through her means: such beauty perhaps might almost have excused my selfish aspirations, had I erred no farther; but I indulged in these visions until I began to imagine

their realization to be rather a certainty than a chance: and I was confirmed in the belief, by the gaze of admiration which every where followed my lovely child, as I leant proudly on her arm; while she, utterly unconscious or regardless of the attention which she attracted, sought only to amuse, and to support me. Agnes, I hoped for a time, but at length I *determined*, that she should be won only by greatness, or by gold: I forgot that she had a heart; or, if indeed I remembered it, I did not the more relax in my resolve. During this period, the orphan son of one who had been my dearest friend, returned from Jamaica; he was a Lieutenant in the Navy: high-spirited, open-hearted, and ardent. All the most heavy of our misfortunes had fallen on us since his departure; but Henry Davenel was not to be changed by adverse fortune, nor the world's frowns. His vessel had been on a three years' cruise; and he had some difficulty in tracing us to our humble home; but he persisted, for he felt that



to suffer the difficulty of the search to overcome him, would be at once to rank himself among the heartless crowd who had fallen from us on all sides. Your father found us, Agnes; I was unchanged, but such was not the case with Ellen: I saw at once that he was overwhelmed by her loveliness, but I only looked on him with a scornful smile, for I had other views for my child. Henry Davenel depended on his profession for the means of existence; and I almost laughed in the pride of my spirit at his presumption in thinking of my beautiful and highly-destined Ellen. You may wonder at such weakness in one of broken fortune, and I can now wonder at it myself; but remember, that I had been living in a state of mental excitement for many months; and that the conviction had grown on me, that my fondest visions would be embodied. Nevertheless, the society of your father was so delightful to me in our seclusion; his manly and generous friendship was such an oasis in the desert of



cold hearts by which we were surrounded, that I could not forego it, at whatever risk to her who should have been my first thought. I did not forego it—day after day Henry Davenel was our guest, he was with us in our morning walks, and beside our evening hearth; to me he was tender and attentive as a son, while to Ellen he was more, far more than any brother could have been. They read, and painted together; and sometimes he sat beside the instrument, and listened to her sweet voice, as she accompanied it; while at other times he would take up his guitar, and gaily sing to us the melodies of Italy and Spain. Surely my selfishness must have been more than mortal; or my infatuation beyond all parallel! It must have been—*it was*.——” Mrs. Sydenham silently veiled her eyes with her hands for a moment, and then continued with forced composure.

“Your mother was attacked by fever—on the third day I was told that human help was

vain—never shall I forget that moment: I clung to Davenel in the frenzy of my despair, and bade him save my child, for that all others had abandoned us. He heard my appeal, and, under Heaven, he answered it: he was unwearied and unsubdued; he shrank from associating Ellen with the idea of death, and he would not admit the possibility of such an event; he appeared all-sufficient; he thought, he acted for all around him; and while I sat uselessly in the stupor of wretchedness, or shrieked out my impotent and maddened misery beside the bed of my unconscious child; he supplied my place, and was ever ready to soothe and to allay her sufferings. She recovered; on his arm she leant to breathe once more the pure air, and to bask in the glorious sunshine; and when, overpowered by the fatigue consequent on her weakness, she lay for hours on the sofa in our quiet parlour, he told her tales of foreign lands, or read to her, to cheat her convalescence of its monotony. Will

any marvel that with returning strength, grew a deep love for Henry Davenel in the breast of Ellen? I saw, I knew that such was the case; but when the dread of losing her had passed away, my old thoughts, and speculations, and resolutions returned; yet I dared not then impart them to her; the blossom had but just raised its head after the sweeping by of the blast, and I felt that one rude breath, at such a time, would scatter it. Thus did I reconcile to myself the cruelty of suffering them to spend day after day in the society of each other; to be alone together for hours; to read from the same book, and to become dependent on each other for their pleasures and their amusements. Agnes, bitterly have I expiated my error! From this dream of peace and affection, we were awakened by a summons to Davenel to rejoin his vessel, which was about once more to leave England for the coast of Africa: the lip of your father quivered as he read the letter; he looked towards Ellen, who

had become deadly pale at the sight of his emotion; then he smiled, but it was sadly and with effort, as, forcing himself to affect a composure which he did not feel, he once more read the letter aloud: a scream, wild and piercing, burst from your mother, and she fell to the ground lifeless: a pang smote upon my heart, as we raised her up, and laid her, all unconscious as she was, on a sofa; but I would not suffer myself to be hurled down from my visionary height, even by this demonstration of deep and devoted affection; with a cold eye and a stern tone, I desired Davenel to leave the room, but he hesitated to obey me: I persisted, and he endeavoured to reason me out of my obduracy; miserable man! he knew me not even then.—The vehemence of my passion aroused Ellen from her torpor; she unclosed her eyes, and rose from her recumbent position: she stretched forth her arms, but, for the first time, they were not stretched forth to *me*—and in the next moment, she was resting

on the heart of Davenel ! I have often wondered since, that the passion of that instant did not suffocate me : I felt that the rock on which I had built up my hope, was sliding from beneath my feet ; yet, with the unpromising cruelty of selfishness, I resolved never to yield. I assailed them with reproaches, but they only clung the more closely to each other : I overwhelmed them with arguments, but they listened with the respectful silence of determined affection, and bore with the violence to which they would not bow. I had reserved one threat which I knew would shake the soul of Ellen to its depths : I scarcely believe, even now, that I meant to utter it, but in my vehemence it was uttered. I swore that if she persisted in her disobedience, I would never see her more ; that I would spurn her from my home and from my heart ; and that I would die unforgiving, as I had lived.

“ It was a fearful vow, Agnes ; ” continued the old lady as a cold shudder crept through

the veins of the attentive girl, “ fearful in its conception, and ill-fitted to the lips of a christian mother, and one who loved her child ; but in the excitement of the moment, when Ellen clung to my knees, and almost shrieked in her agony, as she besought me to revoke that vow, I only breathed it more sternly. In vain she reminded me of all that Davenel had been to us ; to me a son and a protector, to herself a brother and a nurse ; I scoffed at her tears, and told her all that I had resolved : I saw the proud blood mount to her brow, and she instantly rose from her knees. While she thought that the mere dread of parting from her influenced my violence, she only loved me the more amid her suffering ; but when she found that I sought to make a traffic of her beauty ; that even by my own confession, I could coldly resign her to dotard rank, or worthless riches, heedless of all beside, if my ambition or my avarice could be satisfied ; then she taught me that I was unworthy of



such a child. She did not reproach me; words of bitterness would have died on her gentle lips; she only turned to Davenel, and exclaiming faintly; 'Save me from such a fate!' flung herself upon his breast. He would have led her away on the instant; nor should I, trembling as I was with mingled rage and disappointment, have stretched forth a hand to detain her; but Ellen paused at the door of the apartment: 'Mother!' she said; I can repeat her very words, for they are seared into my brain! 'Mother!—we have mistaken each other; and I am indeed an orphan; yet say that you revoke those dreadful words, say that you knew not what you uttered; that you sought not to degrade your only child by such a hateful—no!—no!—you could not mean it.'—Agnes, that you may not hate me for the remainder of my days, I spare you my reply: suffice it that your father carried her senseless from the room, and having procured a coach, entered it with our solitary servant, and con-

veyed your unfortunate mother to the house of a female relative of his own. On the return of my weeping attendant, I made no enquiries: I asked not if Ellen were alive or dead; I think that for the remainder of that day I was wholly indifferent to her fate. On the second morning after her departure I received a letter; I turned to the signature: it was *Ellen Davenel*: I burst into a laugh of bitterness, and cast the out-pourings of her affection into the flame."

Again Mrs. Sydenham paused; the tears of Agnes were flowing freely, but her grandmother knew not how to weep; spirit-wrung, and wretched, she sat for a few moments with her eyes fixed on the dying embers of their scanty fire, ere she could command sufficient composure to proceed with her narrative, which she did at length slowly and feebly.

"The kind-hearted female who had accompanied Ellen and Davenel on their departure from my wretched home, despite my frowns

and menaces, would at times talk to me of my child ; and within a week, I heard that Davenel had left her to join his ship ; dare I tell you, Agnes, that I heard it with joy ! She had then no one to comfort her ; she was suffering, how bitterly I could judge too well by the step which she had taken ; and she was suffering alone : she could not pity my oneliness, for like me she had none left to love her now ; we were equals in misery ! She had overthrown my visions of happiness, and her own had vanished, perhaps for ever. Twice she came to my door, but it was shut against her : I had made a vow, and with wretched sophistry, I persuaded myself that its impious observance was a virtue ; I would not suffer my own heart to prove to me that I was only cherishing a deadly revenge. A miserable year passed by ; and with blind presumption I entered the house of prayer week after week, and carried even to the footstool of my Creator an undying enmity : it is said,

Agnes, that the dearest friends make the most implacable enemies; and surely it must be so; in my own case it was. I had loved your mother with an absorbing love, until the unworthy thought of self, the weak repining for past luxuries, and the desire to repossess them, mingled with my heart's current, and polluted its stream. A second year had almost worn away, when I was told that my wretched child had no longer a husband; and that you, Agnes, whose birth had taken place without having shaken my stern spirit, that you were an orphan. For a time I was stunned by the intelligence; but even when I fully comprehended the extent of her misfortune, I repeated to myself my vow!—*my vow!* and more, I abided by it. Yes! I almost gloated over the fullness of my revenge, and would not lessen it one iota though it were to save my only child.—Another month," continued the old lady rapidly, as though she feared the failure of her resolution; "another month

and I had no child ; my vengeance, measureless, as it was motiveless, was at length appeased ; and I was the veriest wretch that ever breathed the breath of life ; I flew to the bed of death : I clasped the senseless corse with a tenderness which would have been to my living Ellen beyond all other blessings : but it now availed her nothing ; one thing only I did which may save me from your hatred, Agnes ; I swore on my bent knees beside your mother's death-couch, to cherish her infant child ; to share with her my last loaf and my last cup of water ; and amid poverty and wretchedness I have kept my vow !”

“ You have indeed kept it, my revered grandmother !” exclaimed Agnes, sinking at the feet of the repentant and soul-stricken old lady ; who with a convulsive effort folded her arms about the weeping girl, and buried her face upon her shoulder.



## CHAPTER XIII.

To enjoy perfectly the prospect of a ball, we should be always young, always handsome, and always light-hearted ; young, that we may not have lost the elasticity of hope ; handsome, that we may still possess the excitement of vanity ; and light-hearted, that no thought of passed or passing annoyance may throw its cold, blank cloud over the horizon of present pleasure. There are a thousand associations of light and beauty which we lose as we advance in years ; a thousand bright visions from which we awaken after the experience of three or four seasons : palpitations yield to placidity, bright eyes become less attractive

than *recherché* suppers ; and sweet tones are unable to compete with champagne punch ; a pretty ancle fades before an *écarté* table ; and a fine figure is out-rivalled by a long purse. Pleasant days of youth ! when the world takes a tint from the sanguine heart, which bounds to mingle in its crowd : when every smile is trusted, and every profession is credited ; when kindness is paid back seven-fold ; and the effect enjoyed without one misgiving as to the cause ! Pity that we cannot be always young ; and gambol through existence, like a child in a flower-garden ; lingering where we list, cul-ling the brightest flowers, and scattering the weeds to the winds to take fresh root where they may ! But these are not the reflections with which to enter an assembly in London ; these are not the feelings with which to stand shivering for twenty minutes on a stair-case ; surrounded by draughts and dowagers, powdered lacqueys and pouting debutantes ; victimized between blonde and bavardage ; ex-

pending at once, time, temper, and small-talk; deafened by energetic applications to the knocker; and wearied by the monotonous repetition of familiar or uninteresting announcements. These miseries are unnumbered in the anticipating day-dream of uninitiated beauty, who pants for the happy moment when her satin slipper may alight on the carpeted hall, and deems that at that delicious instant, her triumphs are to begin. Yet these are, nevertheless, the purgatorial trials which precede the paradise (?) of a town rout; these are the perils deprecated by the belle of high taste and slender means, and loved by the modiste of high taste and high charges.

On the night of Lady Blacksley's ball, her fair niece escaped equally the Scylla of the breezy hall, and the Charybdis of the crowded staircase: the exhaustion of her bland smiles, and the disarrangement of her blonde dress; she was seated in as pretty a little temple as ever enshrined mortal goddess, breathing the sweet

breath of the choicest exotics, within the shade of a drapery of pale rose-coloured silk, under a lamp, whose light fell softly about her like moonlight; she had flowers in her bosom, and diamonds upon her brow: she was the queen of the revel; and she had a host of little fancies sporting about her brain, of future profusion, and luxury, and triumph: which gave unwonted animation to her eye, as it travelled over the many groups which were scattered through the Countess's spacious rooms. Colinet was soft in the distance, flatterers were near her; her mirror had told her a pleasant tale that night, of which these voluble triflers were the agreeable echoes; and, in short, Lady Clara Ashburnham had not looked so well—at least she had reason to think so—for the last ten seasons. “Ten seasons!” we hear some scornful young beauty exclaim, who is looking forward to her second period of delusion and delight. Yes, even so: Lady Clara had already trodden the gay round

until she had overcome its giddiness: but French lamps, and French tulle, and French manners, and French dances, have been most resuscitatory in their effects on the modern antiques of our London drawing-rooms. Lady Clara did look well, for she had neither spared the Earl's note case, nor the patience of her woman; she looked well, for she had thirty thousand per annum in perspective, and a very becoming dress in possession: the noble Lord, her father, had declared his perfect satisfaction with her appearance; and the noble Lord, her brother, had decided that he really believed she had still a chance of getting married after all.

The rooms filled rapidly, and the bowery recess wherein Lady Clara had enshrined herself, was soon occupied by a select party of her immediate friends: Mrs. Tenterton, the wife of a right honorable diplomatist, and her five daughters, (to whom Lady Blacksley's niece was always particularly civil, as they

were capital foils), were among the number ; her aunt's half sister, Lady Leslie Barnington, whose husband preferred claret to Colinet, and an entremet to an entrechat was chaperoning, or rather countenancing Lady Clara ; and being the junior, by five or six years, was receiving her countenance in return. Lady Clara, who possessed excellent generalship, had determined on not dancing for the first hour, in order that she might wear out the evening becomingly : the several Misses Tenterton stood beating time to the band with their sandalled feet, mentally resolved to join the first set to which they were invited ; and sighing for a more efficient chaperone than their mother, who, perhaps, thinking that one diplomatist sufficed in a family, and, moreover, finding her girls somewhat difficult to disperse in a ball room, quietly left them to their fate. Lionel Lovell was urging Lady Clara to waltz : she was inex-



orable: the five daughters of Mrs. Tenterton smiled, and looked amiable, but Lovell was inexorable in his turn, and remained quietly beside Lady Barnington.

"Yonder goes Miss Escotville:" said Lady Clara, "about to waltz with Morton Mowbrey, I protest: surely she should leave off waltzing, now she is on the eve of marriage."

"Going to be married!" exclaimed the honourable Mrs. Tenterton, in an accent of blended astonishment and annoyance; "Miss Escotville going to be married, did you say?"

"How odd!" ejaculated the five daughters of the lady at the same moment.

"And yet, so it is," said Lionel Lovell, with a quiet smile; "Miss Escotville is actually about to be married to the talented Lord Piedmont."

"A roué!" sneered Mrs. Tenterton, with a flushed cheek.

"So ugly!" said her eldest daughter. "Miss Tenterton *had been* a beauty."

"Has such horrid whiskers!" lisped the sentimental Sapphira.

"So tall and thin! such an animated finger-post!" intonated the plump little Emily.

"Dresses in such bad taste!" smiled Miss Marguerita—Marguerita was a model of preposterousness in fashion.

"Never dances, and calls waltzing a bore!" sneered Priscilla the youngest, who had carried away more chalk on her little slippers during the season than either of her sisters.

"And yet with all these imperfections to counterbalance a refined mind, travelled tastes, high manners, a large fortune, and brilliant connexions," said Lady Leslie Barnington, "Miss Escotville is satisfied to accept him as a husband."

"Oh! undoubtedly," replied Mrs. Tenterton, with a smile of affected scorn, "it is a fine chance for a girl without sixpence. I have

always said that Evelind Escotville knew pretty well the dessous des cartes! What an infatuation on the part of Lord Piedmont to throw himself away on a penniless coquette."

"With red hair—"

"And sallow complexion—"

"No pretensions to figure—"

"Always in the same style of dress—"

"And can neither gallop nor dance the Mazurka—"exclaimed the young ladies one after the other; like the firing along a line for a feu-de-joie.

Lady Barnington glanced towards Lovell. "And yet," she remarked calmly, "Lord Piedmont considers her as a fortune in herself. Calls her hair auburn—her complexion exquisite—her form perfect—her dress classical—and her dancing the true 'poetry of motion.' Such, young ladies, is the metamorphosizing power of love. I suspect that he would never recognize the original who sat for the sketch with which you have collectively favoured us.

But enough of this. I hear that Godfrey Esham is returned from Spain; he was, I believe, very intimate at Tenterton Lodge."

"Come, come, my dear Lady Barnington," said the mother, with one of her most sunny smiles, "do not look as though you suspect more than you care to express—really——" and she laid her hand (and it was a very beautiful one, sparkling with gems,) on the arm of her companion—"really it was mere friendship, nothing more—where there are so many girls, you are aware that young men are apt to be rather constant in their visits. Sapphira, my love, *do* move those heavy curls a little more backward; have you forgotten how frequently Mr. Esham told you that they destroyed the contour of your face? Well, I am glad that Godfrey is at last returned; we have been long looking for him: indeed, his protracted residence at Madrid was quite unaccountable. Poor fellow! he used to devote nearly all his time to us; *generally*, I mean of

course. He certainly taught Sapphira to recite, and to read the Italian poets; but he would have been as ready to instruct the others, I have no doubt, had they possessed the same tastes."

"I most cordially rejoice to hear that such is the case," said Lady Clara, with suppressed merriment; "for I confess I *had* feared that the intelligence of his marriage would have been a shock to some individual of your family; we may, under these circumstances, however, tell you that he has brought home his bride,"—Mrs. Tenterton coldly withdrew her hand from the arm of Lady Barnington—"a lovely and accomplished Spanish woman. I hear she is a model of perfectibility."

"And I suppose," interposed Lovell, "that all the *élégantes* in town will next season sport the veil and the mantilla; for, with her beauty, and his connexion, Mrs. Esham cannot fail to be a star."

"I pity her!" replied Mrs. Tenterton, with

affected feeling. "As an acquaintance, the young man was eligible enough, but as a husband—horrid! He has no character—no stability."

"Something of a flirt, was he not?" asked Lady Barnington, shrewdly.

"A male coquette, my good friend: so particular in his attentions, but withal so inconsistent. Poor Esham fancied himself a poet; wrote three charades and an epitaph, and foreswore the Muses—then he turned mineralogist, got cheated by a vender of alum spars, and gave away his cabinet; nay, I could cite a hundred of his extravagances, but *le jeu ne vaut pas la chandelle*."

"Well, well," laughed Lady Barnington; "he is now become a benedict, and a woman of fashion must never quarrel with the eccentricities of her lord, even though he were the veriest *testa dura* on the matrimonial list; for, if she cannot turn his folly to account, at least it may avail her something *pour passer le temps*."



Mrs. Tenterton was in no mood for jesting : with five single daughters, every marriage out of her family was a distinct pang ; and here, Godfrey Esham, with ten thousand a year, whom she had feasted, flattered, and she thought fascinated, for the last three seasons, had escaped her toils—actually overlooked her five girls, and thrown himself away upon a pair of horrid black eyes ! Mrs. Tenterton thanked the fates that she had no bold black eyes in her family. She was herself a fine woman, as Morton Mowbrey had told her—the silvery-toned Morton Mowbrey—a perfect autumnal rose ! And he had not altogether forfeited his claim to good taste in the declaration ; for she was a tall, dashing, shewy matron ; highly rouged, and looking as little *passée* as might be.

“ What sweet verses Mr. Esham wrote to Miss Daverson ! ” sighed Sapphira, casting up her eyes ; “ I never think of them without being quite affected ! ” Lovell smiled, as

though he had perverted the lady's meaning.

"Apropos;" said Lady Clara, "have I not heard that Mr. Esham was some time ago to have married that same Miss Daverson?"

"Yes;" replied Mrs. Tenterton, "but you know what Shakspeare says,—'these fellows of infinite tongue, that can rhyme themselves into ladies favours, they do always reason themselves out again,' and Esham is an exemplification of the theory."

"Yet I remember to have heard it hinted that he withdrew himself;" said Lady Barnington; "but I beg pardon, Miss Daverson, if I mistake not, is your niece."

"Oh! pray do not apologize;" smiled Mrs. Tenterton; "in affairs of that description, we feel much as we do at cards, we look to our own points, and leave others to play as they please." The lady spoke blandly, for she had smarted several times under the lash of Lady Barnington during the progress of the conver-

sation, and she now returned the taunt. Lady Barnington's predilection for the excitement of the card-table was well known, and it was said—but to repeat mere reports were idle; what is not said of a female gamester?

At this moment Lady Clara bent her jewelled head with even more than her wonted urbanity, and Mrs. Tenterton's eye followed her's, to discover the favoured object of the smile and the bow. "Who is that young man," she asked carelessly, "who is endeavouring to make his way towards our party?"

"That is Mr. Joseph Nichols;" said Lady Clara, "heir to the rich Mr. Roberts."

"Quite a corsair countenance!" sighed Sapphira.

"How remarkably well his hair is dressed," followed up Marguerita.

"For my part;" said Lady Barnington somewhat soured by the remark of Mrs. Tenterton; "I always want taste for the purse-

proud progeny of overgrown tradesmen. Old Roberts was a mere money-making miser."

"Of course under such circumstances, your aristocratical ladyship will shrink from an introduction to this ill-descended Cræsus;" quietly remarked Lovell. "Well, poor Nichols must console himself as he best may, though I confess myself sorry for him; ay, and for your ladyship also, for he is one of the best écarté players in town."

"Is he indeed?" exclaimed Lady Barnington; "well then, as I have no daughters to whom he may presume to offer his city civilities, I will venture to admit him to my soirées. Perhaps, Mr. Lovell, you will manage this for me."

Poor Lady Clara! she could have annihilated both the speakers, and she could have banished poor Mrs. Tenterton and her five gawky daughters to the mines of Africa for having been guilty of listening to such treason against her intended lord; but the evil was

committed; and she breathed more freely as Lovell, apparently wearied by his position, sauntered into the ball room.

"Mr. Lovell is certainly a charming young man," said Mrs. Tenterton, as he disappeared, "and decidedly a wit!"

"And a rake;" added Lady Barnington, the glass of whose temper had been gradually lowering, and was now below the freezing point; "and what is infinitely more underbred, he is a quizzer; he makes his own vices shine by the varnish of fashion, and renders the follies of others more prominent by the scalping-knife of his satire—I detest such characters!"

"It must certainly be confessed that he spares neither friends nor foes, for even your ladyship's card-parties could not escape;" said Mrs. Tenterton, with a polite smile of gratified spleen. "I heard the other day of his having said that he thought your porter should be attired as the King of Clubs, and your butler as Pam—the Queen of Hearts, he forgot to add,

must always be found with your ladyship, so you must allow me to make that addition."

"He has a very courtly way of saying ill-natured things;" replied lady Barnington in her turn; "I remember he favoured us with a dissertation on matrimony the other evening; and was very facetious on the subject of establishment hunting, which he appears perfectly to comprehend in all its details; and he vowed that he would rather be condemned to the tread-mill for seven years, than be the mother of four or five unmarried daughters. 'Such agonies,' said he, 'such lacing, and bracing, and lecturing, and attitudinizing, and starving; and tying in, and stuffing out, and practising parts; as thus:—the eldest to smile, and smile, and be—all smiles! the second to languish, and talk of Byron, and forswear rouge; the third to eat meat breakfasts, and like the Moorish ladies, endeavour to be valuable by her weight, a female billiard ball: the fourth to wear flounces, and gauzes, and fea-



thers, and to look like the figures in Ackerman's Repository; an animated milliner's block, as a sort of recommendation to the goods: the fifth to quadrille, and galope, and pirouette; a very Terpsichore to dance away the patience and the shoe-soles of the unwary.' This is a very sketchy outline of his oration, but we were all perfectly convulsed with laughter; and Godfrey Esham vowed it was the best thing he had heard since he returned to England."

Mrs. Tenterton had been busied in arranging her Cachemire, during this kind recapitulation of the witticisms of Mr. Lionel Lovell. Lady Barnington looked so calm, and so collected, and so courteous; she had repaid the King of Clubs, and Pam, a thousand fold! Mrs. Tenterton felt that she had; and suddenly catching a glimpse of some dear friend whom she had been dying to see for the last hour, she nodded a gentle 'au revoir' to Lady Clara and her companion, and swept

forward to the ball room, on the arm of her eldest girl, followed by the junior Misses Tenterton in couples.

In five minutes the low, lady-like laughter which had followed the retreat of the Tenterton family, had died away; and the bowery recess was empty. Lady Barnington was on her way to the card-room, on the arm of a sallow East Indian General; and Lady Clara was whirling gracefully round in the waltz, with the plebeian hand of Mr. Joseph Nichols clasping her aristocratic waist. A diamond pin of the largest dimensions, and finest water, was flashing in her eyes; and visions of a golden future were dancing over her brain. Eager questions of the gentleman's identity were asked by speculative dowagers: received with shrugs and sneers by the independent; and by glances at their high-born and high-dressed daughters by the remainder. Noble earls, and right honorable younger sons knew him well, for they had seen him at

the 'clubs;' and were aware that he paid freely for the privilege of handling the same cards and dice as themselves; many of them owed him money, and these were by far the most gracious; for in the exuberance of their friendship they even offered to introduce him to poor cousins, and plain sisters; but Mr. Nichols had a game of his own to play that night, and the stake was a high one; consequently he declined to be made known to red hair, snub noses, and obliquity of vision, even in the persons of Lady Janes, Lady Sarahs, and Honorable Misses; and while Frank Harcourt, by dint of fine eyes and impudence, contrived to ingratiate himself with half a score of court beauties; and to make each in her turn marvel who the handsome, agreeable Mr. Harcourt could be, where he had come from, and who had brought him; his friend danced with no one but Lady Clara Ashburnham; spoke to no one who was not in the Earl of Somerville's immediate set; and

finally accompanied his lordship to a card-room, and contrived to lose a few thousands ere he left the table. The earl was all urbanity; and during the pauses in the game, hoped that his "dear Clara" would not be over-fatigued; but the "dear girl" was so careless of herself, when she could spare others, that he feared she would suffer from her exertions, &c. &c. Mr. Nichols never doubted the genuineness of this parental anxiety for a moment; his lordship, the Earl of Somerville, could have no possible motive for affecting all this sentiment to so humble an individual as himself; and consequently Mr. Nichols became more convinced than ever, that the high-born, high-bred, and finely-dispositioned Lady Clara Ashburnham, would be a prize indeed! With this impression, two or three glasses of champagne, and an introduction to the Earl's eldest son, Lord Ashburnham, Mr. Nichols returned to the ball room on the arm of his noble friend; and in ten minutes more he led Lady Clara down to supper.

Lady Clara might have spared her agonies when she found herself at table with "the citizen," as Nichols had been more than once designated during the evening; for he was as completely *au fait* in all the mysteries of pine-ice and Roman-punch as her tenacious ladyship herself: he perfectly understood the proper mode of blending such wines with such viands; and he had a quiet manner of making himself useful, and an impressive method of saying complimentary nothings; very acceptable to a lady who sometimes felt the want of such attentions. Lady Blackley's ball did wonders for her niece; and although on retiring for the night, Lady Clara stood for a moment opposite to her father, and laughed about "city suitors," and "mercantile alliances;" she nevertheless laid her head very complacently on the pillow, and dreamt all the remainder of the night of Belgrave Square, and four long-tailed greys.

## CHAPTER XIV.

"REALLY, Miss Parsons, I can see no reason for your very great anxiety about Mr. Harcourt," said Mrs. Wilkins, with some asperity, "I suppose he does not come to see *you*."

"I should think not, ma'am," replied Miss Parsons.

"You should *think* not!" sharply echoed the widow, "I am sure not; at your age, and in your circumstances, a young man of Mr. Harcourt's pretensions, must be deranged to give you a second thought."

"Certainly, ma'am."

"Then, allow me to tell you, Miss Parsons, that it is highly unbecoming in a sedate,



elderly lady, to be speculating on the whereabouts of gay young bachelors ; and suffering their thoughts to be incessantly filled with them : and now I beg that I may hear no more of this nonsense : but be good enough to walk to the window, and tell me whether I did not hear a carriage stop at the door."

Miss Parsons obeyed : " Yes, ma'am, a cabriolet."

" Mr. Harcourt's cabriolet?"

" Yes, ma'am," responded the companion, who had resolved on not uttering the forbidden name.

" Are they going to keep him in the street all day !" pettishly exclaimed the widow, giving a tremendous pull at the bell-rope ; " pray go and tell them to answer the door."

" I will, ma'am ;" said Miss Parsons, and hurried from the room. Harcourt bounded up the stairs by threes, and entered Mrs. Wilkins's drawing-room without the prelimi-

nary of an announcement. "Here I am at last, my dear madam, just escaped from the Countess of Blacksley's morning coterie, to have an hour's enjoyment with you. You are looking admirably, my dear Mrs. Wilkins—no, I will not have a word about the sore-throat nor the cough," he added, seeing the lady on the eve of speaking; "for as I told Lord Ashburnham last night, after dancing with six plain women, the best way not to yield to your ailments, is neither to look at, nor think of them; but between ourselves, my good madam, many of these ladies of quality are like drag-chains, both heavy and unsightly."

"Fie! fie! you uncourteous cavalier;" smiled the widow, "have you no more respect for your aristocratic acquaintance, than to talk thus?—I shall be afraid of faring very badly indeed at your hands, if you have no more mercy on them."

"You afraid of faring ill at my hands,"—

said Harcourt, in a tone of reproach, which was almost tender, "how little do you understand me—I would rather give up all my titled acquaintance at once, than incur the risk of losing your good opinion."

"You do not—you do not,"—replied Mrs. Wilkins, laying her hand on his; and the lynx-eyed Frank Harcourt remarked at the instant, that though the marriage ring was still there, the mourning one had disappeared; "but you must not talk of giving up the desirable connexions which you have formed—they may be of incalculable advantage to you in after-life; and, meanwhile, if not absolutely profitable, they are very pleasant."

"Profitable!" echoed Harcourt, with a smile of dubious meaning, as he twirled his hat between his fingers, and assumed a pretty, affected little species of confusion, "no, my dear friend, they are so very much the reverse of profitable, that I am afraid—I fear—I—but why should I give way to this false

pride?—why should I be ashamed to confess to *you*, that my finances warn me that I must not be lured into the magic circles of high-life, lest I bring myself into difficulties, which, as a man of honour and principle, I have always considered it my duty to shun."

As Frank spoke, he heard the trampling of his mortgaged horse in his unpaid-for cabriolet, under the window; and he could have laughed at his own impudence; but not so Mrs. Wilkins: the old lady was deeply edified, and suddenly recollecting that she had occasion to write a note to her banker, requested her exemplary young friend to be good enough to drive to Mr. Billington's, and to deliver it with his own hands. Frank promised obedience, without suffering himself to betray a gesture of suspicion, as to the purpose of the visit to Lombard Street; and when the extremely concise communication of Mrs. Wilkins to the respectable banker, was duly sealed and addressed, he deposited it most

carefully in his pocket book, having already made himself master of two passages of the missive; the first being, "Please to pay the bearer at sight,"—and the second, "the sum of five hundred pounds." Perhaps there is not a more generous or amenable creature on earth, than a vain old woman, in the toils of a designing, handsome, manœuvring young bachelor.

Frank sat a full hour with the widow after he had pocketed her "Please to pay;" heartily wishing her at Twickenham or Timbuctoo, or any where, except in his way, when he might have been at the banker's; but he remained quietly in Baker Street nevertheless, telling the amused and credulous Mrs. Wilkins very magnificent and magnified anecdotes of Lady Blacksley's Assembly—what he had said to Marquises, Earls, and Viscounts; and what Dukes, Barons, and M.P.'s had said to him; giving her a list of his Right Honorable partners, and a detailed

description of their costume. In the course of their conversation, he initiated her into two or three political secrets, learnt, at second hand, from cabinet ministers, and court favorites; and he ultimately left the old lady with her brain teeming with visions of revolution, and civil war, and the total ruin of the funded interest.

Just as he rose to depart, Harcourt enquired for Miss Parsons: he really begged her pardon, but he had not missed her before; the widow smiled; she supposed that Miss Parsons was in her room, or giving the dogs an airing in the back garden—in fact, she had not thought of her any more than Mr. Harcourt: Miss Parsons was not what she had been: there was a time when she made herself useful, and entertaining, and, in short, necessary to her; but she had really ceased to be so lately. Harcourt laughed in his sleeve; but he said nothing against the poor companion, for he feared



that in the event of her leaving Baker Street, her successor might be more difficult of management. The widow digressed to her nephew, Mr. Everard Wilkins: he was at Naples; she scarcely knew whether to wish for his return:—Frank decidedly did not. His habits did not assimilate with hers: he was extravagant, and thoughtless; frequented the most expensive civic entertainments, but had no idea of making a figure at the west end of the town: she would not have restricted his expenditure had he possessed proper ambition, such ambition as Mr. Harcourt's: the desire to increase in consequence and consideration: but, no, Everard was every inch a Wilkins—Frank almost writhed as he listened—spent his time and his aunt's money on the wrong side of the Bar, and added nothing to the respectability of the family; as a last resource, she had sent him abroad—Harcourt devoutly prayed that he might join the zingari, or turn bravo—it was

possible that he might return an altered man, but she confessed that she had very little hope. Mr. Harcourt kindly condoled with her: it *was* melancholy, that being her only relative, he should not sacrifice his own tastes and inclinations for such an aunt! but unfortunately, men seldom could wholly shake off the habits and tendencies which had grown up with them from boyhood; for himself, accustomed to, and, indeed, in some degree, identified with certain pursuits and associates, as he was, he feared that, with the best inclination in the world to do so, he should be unable to effect it. Mrs. Wilkins, in his case, saw no necessity for the effort: his pursuits were all praiseworthy—Frank felt his cachinnatory muscles fearfully convulsed—his associates were all unexceptionable: people of rank and title—poor Mrs. Wilkins had such an inordinate reverence for the aristocracy, that she never could connect any idea of littleness with a lord, and her

respect deepened as the title became more sonorous. One of the holds which Harcourt had on her heart, was his voluble mention of high names, and his familiar anecdotes of high people; she loved to talk to her acquaintance of Mr. Harcourt's friend, Lady Blacksley, and Mr. Harcourt's flirt, Lady Clara Ashburnham; and to initiate them into the mysteries of exclusive soirées and select conversazioni: she loved, also, to remark, with affected carelessness, that her champagne was considered very superior to that of the Earl of Somerville; and that Lord Ashburnham had threatened to come and lay siege to her claret. Her friends listened to her, and laughed at her; and wondered at her infatuation for so self-sufficient and presuming a young man as Mr. Harcourt, and not unfrequently were somewhat doubtful as to the veracity of his anecdotes; but they all agreed that his reign must be a short one, for that Mrs. Wilkins would certainly before long see

the ridicule to which she was exposing herself at her years, by suffering herself to be made the tool of a needy adventurer. But these good people were mistaken; Mr. Marsden looked grave, and became more sententious than ever; Mr. Smith, the apothecary, declared the widow not to be half so good a patient as she had been; and Mr. Billington mentioned in confidence, to half-a-dozen particular friends, that she was becoming vastly extravagant. The servants in Baker Street meanwhile, always hailed the appearance of the young Barrister; he was unexact and liberal; the very description of person who is invariably the best attended to every where; they treasured his jokes at their lady's table, and retailed them at their own; in short, Harcourt was too popular, and had too much at stake, to be easily set aside.

His wants had become alarmingly numerous: his tastes fastidiously difficult: he had created for himself so many imaginary necessi-

ties, that he felt it was now too late for him ever to recur to his original mode of life; he had passed the rubicon; and like the Sybarite who shrank from the crumpled rose-leaves upon his couch, he shuddered as he thought of a return to the coarsenesses and the collision of the every-day world.

## CHAPTER XV.

HARCOURT lost no time in visiting Lombard Street; his quick glance had not deceived him; Mr. Billington, gravely, but courteously, handed over the amount of the cheque; and Frank on the instant asked for pen, ink, and paper, and sat down and wrote a neat letter of thanks to his very liberal and considerate patroness. This well-expressed epistle he transferred to his waistcoat-pocket, and springing into his cabriolet, drove as fast as he could through the contaminating avenues of the city. At Charing Cross he pulled up; and desiring his groom to drive with all speed to Baker Street, and deliver the letter, he sauntered



idly along towards the Horse Guards. He had not walked above a hundred yards when his attention was excited by the figure of a female in front of him; she was plainly, very plainly dressed; but, nevertheless, her form was too perfect to escape observation; Harcourt saw at once that she was a gentlewoman, for there was a quiet gentility and retenue about her, which seemed to deprecate impertinence, unprotected as she was; he remarked that she had an exquisite foot and ancle; and he at once resolved to see if the face of his Incognita were worthy of her figure; he passed her at a rapid pace, and then turned, and met her more slowly: as they approached each other, he partially intercepted her progress, and their eyes met; involuntarily Harcourt murmured a hurried apology, and raised his hat; the unknown bowed gracefully but slightly, and quietly pursued her way. The young barrister stood for a moment on the trottoir, following her with his eyes; an instinctive

respect, for which he could not account, prompted him to suffer her to depart without interruption; but as he looked at her plain dress of dark silk, and her close bonnet, and remembered that she was unattended, and consequently unprotected, the feeling wore away—she *could* be nobody, and she was decidedly the most beautiful girl he had ever seen: and he consequently determined at all events, and at all hazards, to see where she was going, and if possible to discover who she was. For this laudable purpose, he followed her down Parliament Street, and, rather to his satisfaction than his surprise, saw her traverse Westminster Bridge. “A suburban;” he muttered between his teeth. “I thought so; a milliner, or the daughter of a retired tallow-chandler—but she is too handsome for the suburbs.” Still the unknown walked on, until they were fairly beyond the streets, and then she quickened her pace. “Egad! she is leading me a pretty dance!” was the next

ejaculation of Harcourt; yet still he pursued her. At length they reached a part of the road which had an air of cockney rurality about it, wondrously amusing to the young barrister; nursery grounds stretched along on one side of them to a considerable distance, and on the other, the prime-looking houses receded slightly from the contamination of the public thoroughfare, and displayed each its dusty clump of shrubs, and patch of dingy turf, within a green-painted wooden railing. By this time the patience of Harcourt had fairly ebbed away; his provoking Incognita had not even once turned her head, to encourage him by a second glimpse of her bright black eyes: he could desist no longer; he was resolved that his adventure should not turn out a mere wild-goose chase; and yet the peculiarly dignified and quiet demeanour of the unknown beauty, awed him in despite of himself. But Harcourt had been too long habituated to self-indulgence to suffer a feeling

of deference for he knew not whom, to thwart him in any gratification of his fancy; and accordingly he quickened his pace, and on reaching the fair pedestrian, he addressed to her one of the many flippant impertinences which rise so naturally to the lips of idle and dissolute young men, and which wound in proportion as they are contemptible. The lady stopped, shuddered slightly, and then recovering herself, hurried forward at a more rapid pace than before. But Harcourt had gone too far to recede; he had also seen once more a countenance of perfect beauty turned on him for an instant more in sorrow than in anger; and as he traced the expression of alarm which instantly succeeded that sorrow, he only felt a more perfect conviction that she was not yet within reach of protection. Two or three individuals whom they passed, looked towards the young barrister with a low smile of cunning enjoyment, as though they comprehended his employment, and felt no disposition to interfere

with it; and even while Harcourt loathed the look of vulgar understanding which they cast on him, he nevertheless felt more assured in his impertinence. In vain he protested, besought, and threatened:—"Leave me! in pity leave me!" was the only reply which he could extort from his victim; but the voice in which the words were breathed, was so low and musical, that it counteracted the petition. Still they proceeded, and still Harcourt became more impertinent; he uttered insulting flatteries, he made insulting proposals; the lady's breath heaved thickly, her cheeks were flushed, and the tears stood in her eyes. Suddenly she stopped; an unnatural energy seemed to give her on the instant the powers of utterance and action. "Sir," she said in a steady voice, as she raised her eyes proudly to his; "you have mistaken me—I am poor and unprotected, but I am not an object for insult. As you are a gentleman—as you are a man—distress me no farther."



"Were you one degree less beautiful, I would obey you on the instant;" said Harcourt with a light laugh: "but the thing is impossible: I can no more suffer you to escape me, than I can live without inhaling the breeze of heaven. Come, come, this is idle coquetry; unworthy of you, and tantalizing to me."

"Unhand me, sir!" almost shrieked the terrified girl, as Harcourt grasped her arm; but he held her fast.

"Is there no help—no hope!" she exclaimed wildly, gazing round her with a look of horror and alarm.

"Both, madam:" said a voice near them, and a young man of gentlemanly and prepossessing exterior stood beside the affrighted female: "I repeat the lady's words, sir;" he continued with calm firmness, "as you are a gentleman—as you are a man—insult her no farther."

"Oh! you are the fair one's champion, young sir; am I not to understand as much?" asked Harcourt insultingly: "a modern Quix-



ote, wandering over the world to rescue distressed damsels, and to punish their oppressors? You will have plenty of work on your hands in the purlieus of London."

"Not sufficient to weary me in well-doing;" replied the stranger with dignified self-possession: "and now, sir, I request no longer; but I insist that you release the lady."

"Insist!" repeated Harcourt, elevating his eyebrows with an expression of contemptuous scorn: "may I take the liberty of enquiring by what authority you insist?"

"By mine—by mine;" gasped out the bewildered girl, with that instinctive feeling of trust, which is so peculiar to innocence, and which the appearance of the stranger so involuntarily bespoke; struggling, as she said so, to disengage herself from the grasp of Harcourt, "by *my* authority."

"Are you satisfied, sir?" asked the stranger.

"Oh, perfectly!" replied the baffled barrister with a bow of affected ceremony, releas-

ing the lady as he saluted her champion ;  
“ who could be otherwise ; I have, however,  
at least the merit of having effected an introduction between two persons who appear to understand each other by a species of freemasonry ; and whose acquaintance seems likely to ripen as suddenly as it has been formed.” And turning on his heel with an invidious smile, which ill-concealed the annoyance that he really felt, he slowly retraced his steps.

What increased the mortification of Harcourt, was the conviction, which in spite of himself he could not avoid feeling, that the intruder who had so unceremoniously interfered with his amusements, was a gentleman, and moreover one of the finest men he had seen for some time ; the latter consideration perhaps stung him the most ; relying as he did on his personal appearance for fortune. Frank wondered who and what he was, and whether he were really a stranger to the beautiful girl for whom he had stood for-

ward as a champion; altogether, his temper was considerably ruffled; he had not discovered who the fair one was: he had taken a long, unsatisfactory walk; had been baffled, over-reached, and set at nought: and blended with all these unsatisfactory reflections, a suspicion rose in his mind that he had somewhat tamely yielded to the interference of a third party; the calm flashing of the stranger's dark eye no longer met his own, and he began to wonder that he had not more resolutely stood his ground against the intrusive unknown. Such were the cogitations of Frank Harcourt, as he recrossed the bridge, and sauntered towards Regent Street. The adventure of that day he never told at the clubs; for twist and twine it as he would, he felt that he made but a poor figure in the picture; and, consequently, he resolved that it should remain locked up in his own breast, with sundry other little incidents, quite as consistent, and not one whit more creditable.

## CHAPTER XVI.

HARCOURT had proceeded a considerable distance, ere the stranger, who had so generously stepped forward to the succour of the lovely girl whom the young barrister was persecuting, ventured to address his trembling companion. With the cause of his firmness, the effect appeared to have abandoned him; and he stood beside his fair charge, little less embarrassed than herself. That she was very beautiful, he now remarked for the first time, for the impulse of a kind heart had alone prompted him to the line of conduct which he had pursued. Harcourt's last insulting speech; insulting alike to him to whom it was ad-

dressed, and to her before whom it was uttered, still rang in his ears; and for some time he continued silent, fearful lest the timid and trembling girl should attribute to him an inclination to avail himself of the ungenerous hint with which her persecutor had quitted them. But no dread of this description was on the heart of the unknown beauty; the agony of the last half hour had wholly subdued her, and her emotion was so great, that she was unable immediately to proceed. Eustace, for it was he on his way to Mr. Brockendon's cottage at Brixton, where he was to meet Norton, the novelist, at dinner that day by appointment, stood for some moments irresolute as to the line of conduct he should pursue, in order to render the situation of his companion as little distressing as possible: once he raised his hand to his hat, with the intention of bidding her a respectful farewell: but when he looked towards her, and remarked her agitation, and remembered her beauty, and thought that she



was possibly still at some distance from her home; when he reflected above all, with what ready trust she had resigned herself to his protection, and relied on his rescue from insult and annoyance, he felt that his duty towards her was as yet only partially performed, and he lingered to offer his farther services, should she be willing to accept them.

At length he ventured to address her: "You are alarmed, madam; will you suffer me to extend my protection to you until you reach home?"

"Is that fearful man gone?" was the exclamation in reply, as the timid girl swept back her long dark ringlets with her hand, and raised her eyes to Eustace, "Will he not return when you have left me?"

"I will not leave you;" said Eustace, who saw that she was bewildered by terror, "lean on my arm, madam, and I will accompany you whithersoever you desire."

The lady obeyed instinctively; and passing



her hand through the arm of Mortimer, she silently and slowly continued to advance along the path-way, until they stood opposite to the house which has been already described as that tenanted by Mrs. Sydenham. Not a word had been spoken since she had thus unequivocally trusted herself to his protection: agitation on the one side, and delicacy on the other, had suspended all conversation. As they reached the entrance gate, Agnes recognized the tall thin figure of her grandmother, standing near it, watching for her return; and with a stifled exclamation of delight, she disengaged herself from the stranger, and springing towards her natural guardian, fainted on her bosom. The alarm of Mrs. Sydenham was excessive: she glanced hurriedly from her senseless grand-child to the mild and gentlemanly countenance of Eustace; and he answered the enquiring look by a few words of hurried explanation. With a blessing, uttered from the very depths of a stricken spirit, Mrs.

Sydenham suffered him to assist in bearing her precious charge into the house, and there, as the agonized old lady tore away the close bonnet which had in a great degree concealed the beauty of the countenance it shaded, and the long glossy ringlets fell redundantly about her reclining figure, Eustace had leisure and opportunity to remark how fair a creature he had that day rescued from impertinence and peril. For a time she continued insensible, but when signs of returning animation began to repay their united efforts, Eustace reluctantly but generously suggested the propriety of his own departure; a proposal which elicited fresh acknowledgments from the grateful Mrs. Sydenham, with permission to call on the morrow to make enquiries for Miss Davenel. Eustace laid his card on the table, pressed the extended hand of his hostess; uttered some incoherent expressions of solicitude for her grand-child, took another long look at the beautiful, pale creature before him, and left the house.

Eustace was unconscious that he had, within the last two hours, opened a fresh page in the volume of existence; that the ground-spring of his spirit had burst its bounds, and that its pure waters were welling out, brightening and gladdening every feeling of his heart. Every external object appeared to be invested with a new beauty; the sky was bluer and more beautiful; the earth, with its thousand boughs and blossoms, had never, even when he stood among his own dear meadows, looked half so lovely; and as he walked rapidly towards the cottage of Mr. Brockendon, every busy face which he met seemed to him to wear a smile of gladness and delight. He moved like one within a charmed circle; his dreams were all of brightness and beauty; and he almost fancied that he yet felt the pressure of the small hand which had so lately rested on his arm, and met the gaze of the large dark eyes which had been raised to his, with an expression of appeal more beautiful than smiles.

Such was the reverie from which Eustace awoke to the consciousness of being within ten paces of Mr. Brockendon's residence; and in five minutes more, he had passed the wicket, traversed the well-kept little garden, and was standing beneath the rustic verandah with the knocker in his hand.

## CHAPTER XVII.

“ ‘SEEK constancy in wind, or corn in chaff,  
Believe a woman, or an epitaph;  
Or any other thing that's false;’ ”

Declaimed Mr. Brockendon, as a smart foot-boy threw open the door of a delightful room, half library and half snuggerly, and announced Eustace. “Here is Mr. Smithson, who promised to be at my Tusculum at the latest by half-past three o'clock, in order that we might talk over sundry weighty matters of fashion and finance with clear heads, and unencumbered intellects; and he arrives within ten minutes of five, having just calculated to a nicety the precise time which it will require

to arrange his hair after his walk, utter a few comments on the unusual circumstance of a fine day, and be introduced to Mr. Norton, to whom I now beg most particularly to make him known."

"An unforeseen occurrence," commenced Eustace, as he returned the bow of "the popular novelist;" and looked towards his host.

"Oh! yes, yes, that is perfectly understood: unforeseen occurrences happen every day to well-looking young bachelors; at least so they tell me, for I am past all romantic adventures myself, and can walk from Temple Bar, or Pimlico, to Brixton Rise three times a-week, in the most common-place way in the world."

"Nothing unpleasant I trust, sir?" said Mr. Norton.

"By no means;" was the reply, as a slight blush mounted to the brow of Eustace.

"Well, well: this is no confessional, my young friend;" said the host, who perceived



at once that Eustace had no inclination to impart the anecdote, be it what it might; "and now I will ring for the lad to initiate you into the mysteries of my sanctum, from which I hope you will make as speedy a return as may be consistent with your comfort." As he spoke, he rang for the attendant; and Eustace was ushered into the chamber of Mr. Brockendon. It was with some curiosity that he entered it, for there is usually much of the disposition and pursuits of an individual to be inferred from the furniture and arrangement of his peculiar apartment. It was so in this case; literature and luxury were evidently the two leading passions of its occupant; the bed was a modern, tasteful piece of furniture, which almost in appearance negatived its use: the light and graceful hangings fell carelessly over an arrow with a golden head à la Parisienne. Over the mantel, hung an exquisitely-executed portrait in oils, which, from its re-

markable likeness to himself, Eustace at once decided to be that of his father; and beneath it, in a richly-wrought frame, a groupe of flowers, evidently coloured by a female hand; there was a rose: a pale, modest, half-opened blush rose; a small branch of forget-me-not, a sprig of flowering myrtle, and a slender twig of apple-blossom; it had apparently been painted for years; and Eustace had his own suspicions that Mr. Brockendon had himself gone through some of the "romantic adventures," at which he now affected to smile.

Round the apartment were suspended a series of proof engravings from Hogarth; and in a recess hung an exquisite Hebe; Eustace stood and gazed on it for a long interval with intense admiration:—the high, smooth, polished brow; the bright gazel-like eyes, the long luxuriant hair, the partially-revealed throat; the rich, ripe, parted lips;—it seemed almost to breathe! On either

side of the window were a set of bookshelves: Eustace glanced at the titles of the volumes; the *Reminiscences of Michael Kelly*, *Scott's Waterloo*, *Emerson's Greece*, *Parry's Northern Expedition*, a *Book of Roads*, *Hazlitt's Stage*; pocket editions of *Homer*, *Virgil*, *Euclid*, *Goldsmith*, and *Burns*; small copies of the *Spectator*, *Tatler*, and *Idler*; a library set of *Miss Ferrier's "Marriage"*—the first volume lying open at the description of *Lady Juliana Courtney*; a *Treatise on Mathematics*; a *Phrenological Lecture*, taken down in short-hand, and neatly stitched into red leather covers;—such were the somewhat heterogeneous contents of the shelves. Some loose music, principally little French and Spanish romances, and a few of *Madame Vestris'* most popular songs, lay on a side-table. Eustace smiled as he ran over their titles; and then, with the smile still on his lips, descended to the apartment in which he had left his host.

When he entered, Mr. Norton was speaking with great animation : " I admit the position, my good sir ; I am quite prepared to allow that the literary taste of the public is in a most factitious state ; but it is nevertheless a sophism to assert that literary men are the proper objects of blame : if they were writing for themselves, and themselves only, I consider it very questionable whether one out of a score would adopt the line of thought or composition in which he now appears, and for which he is accordingly answerable. Never, perhaps, was there more said on the subject of a ' reading public ;' but, strictly speaking, it is a misnomer to apply such an appellation to the mass of persons of the present day, who devour volume after volume, with a false appetite, and a pre-engaged imagination. The perusal of romances, novels, light biographies, and lighter poetry, does not, to me at least, constitute a ' reading character ;' I consider"—

“ But what I quarrel with,” interposed Mr. Brockendon, “ is the fact of literary men throwing off these identical ‘light’ works of which you are even now speaking; when a little more study and a little more time would enable them to write works, which”——

“ No bookseller would willingly purchase;” interposed Norton in his turn; “ the thirst for variety and excitement is at present so painfully prevalent in England, that readers will not allow themselves either reflection or time enough to enable them to comprehend and to digest scientific volumes, which require research, industry, and accuracy in their author; steadiness, concentrated attention, and relish in their readers. The periodical press, (than which none knows better the taste of the public,) gives us, every month and week, decided proofs of this: those ‘ watchmen of literature,’ as they have been very aptly called, will hail the appearance of works of a higher order—congratulate their readers on the appearance



of such learned, elaborate, and highly-talented productions, and recommend them in good set phrases: but they nevertheless dismiss them in a single column, sometimes in the half of one; lest their subscribers should complain of the heaviness of their own number; and then spread extracts and criticisms of a mere work of fancy over their pages with a point and profusion, which enable them at once to render their own labours light and acceptable, and to create an interest for the work or works so noticed. Booksellers will only purchase what they suppose the public likely to read: and thus the learned and scientific writer finds a dull market, where the compiler of fiction meets a free and ready sale. Is it wonderful then that an author should easily persuade himself to spare at once his mind, his pocket, and his temper?"

"I have, however, heard some novelists complain of a 'dull market,' as you express it;" said the host.



“Doubtlessly—and wherefore? because every idler who takes a pen in hand, and soils a given number of pages, fancies his kite an eagle; and will not be convinced, even by experience, that his work cannot brook the sunlight of criticism—”

“Well, well,” laughed Mr. Brockendon, “here is the announcement of dinner; a work illustrated by plates, from which I trust that we shall all make copious extracts, and one of the party at least I know by experience is well able to discuss the ‘leading article.’” And as he spoke he led the way into the dining-room.

There is a decided charm in a bachelor-dinner; that is, where the host has the true *savoir vivre*, a good income, an unexceptionable cuisine, and a first-rate cellar; this was precisely the case at Mr. Brockendon’s; his single attendant, his familiar as he always called him, seemed to have been born for the express purpose of ministering to his present

master; he required no orders, he waited no bidding! he appeared endowed with the spirit of true, quiet, anticipating inspiration; he *felt* every want, and administered to it ere it was expressed. Mr. Brockendon was never so much at his ease as when at the head of his own table: literally his own, as he was wont to say, without a petticoat to dispute his prerogative: he had tried an old maiden aunt, but she lectured him, and starved his maids; then he brought home a young niece, a pretty rosy-cheeked girl, who gave him bad dinners, and forgot to pay his bills—ran about the neighbourhood to balls and parties, and laughed at his dressing-gown and slippers—so, finding that neither his household nor his comfort prospered under female management, he sent his old aunt back again into Yorkshire, and got his niece married; and then contentedly settled down, after dismissing these unquiet spirits, with his familiar at his elbow, to do as well as he could, bachelor-wise. A shade would

occasionally steal over his features as he talked thus, and the thoughts of Eustace involuntarily recurred to the groupe of flowers in his chamber, and suggested to him that his host had not always dwelt so complacently on the fact of a solitary home, as he now did, or at least affected to do; and perhaps Eustace was right, but there is a kind of bitter enjoyment in jesting at happiness which has been wrenched from us, or passed us by; we love to seem superior to the blight which has nevertheless left its corrosion, even if it has failed utterly to annihilate; and we only expose the canker-worm within, while we imagine that we are shrouding it among the closest folds of our hearts.

The dinner was an admirable one; Apicius might have taken a place at the board, and risen with a smile upon his lips from the feast; the madeira had made three voyages to India, and been cellared for a quarter of a century; and the champagne was iced.

"Wine is like beauty, both are seductive, and both are subtle," said Mr. Norton, as he watched the sparkles which rose laughing to the brim of his glass, "we can little resist either."

"Moore has a melody on that subject," observed the host with a smile, "but I have lost all faith in the theory—pretty enough on paper—you yourself have done some very smart things in that way—'beautiful creations,' as one of the reviews called your women, I remember—"

"Come, come, spare me, I beseech you," said Norton, gaily.

"Spare you! why, you know you ran about with the review in your pocket for a week, and for aught I know, slept with it under your pillow—you authors are the most gullible of all animals, to believe what the editor of a two-and-sixpenny, half-crown, or eight-penny periodical says of you, or to

you, when you should know that the whole system is a job."

"Not the whole, my good sir; that much of the machinery of periodical criticism is defective, I am ready to allow; but not all."

"You could not, meanwhile, have selected a better designation, than that of machinery;" said Mr. Brockendon, "the reviewing system is a piece of machinery, of which half a dozen influential booksellers are the main-spring—Mr So and So publishes a book, no matter what it is, he has purchased the copyright, and the work must be sold: now there are a set of people in the world, ay, and a numerous body they are moreover, who never presume to judge of the merits of any description of literature for themselves, and they must be taught to read this said work; accordingly it is sent to—say Mr. ——— for instance; *there* I am sure of my man; down he sits, to say as

he is paid for saying, that the book is a good book, and a pleasant book, and a talented book—and he makes mysterious allusion to the dashes and asterisks contained in its pages, and gravely informs the public that it has caused ‘a great sensation in the circles of ton’—or that ‘many of its incidents must be yet fresh in the memories of his fashionable readers’—paugh!”

“You *are* sure of your man;” smiled Mr. Norton, “but, believe me, you are prejudiced in asserting such conduct to be universally pursued by the editors of these works—I can personally assure you of your error, for I have experienced far different treatment; the age of truckling is almost over—honesty will, for the future, be the best policy, and the periodical interest was probably never in better hands than at present.”

“Ay, you are a favorite, Norton; the critics are with you; but suppose you were



to publish a work anonymously, do you imagine that the reviews would extol and extract, and the public read and applaud as they do, when they take up the volume and see your name on the title-page?"

"Most assuredly not—and the reason is palpable—reviewers hold themselves, in some degree, responsible to the public, to give them copious extracts from the works of a popular writer; and, although I doubt not that they would do me equal justice as a stranger, I am quite ready to believe that it would be at less length: as regards the public, I am of a different opinion—I think it highly probable that they would throw aside an author's best work, did they not know it to be his, to read his worst, if his name were attached to it, and chanced to be that of a favorite. The very knowledge of this fact, hampers, to a painful degree, the periodical critics; and, in a hundred instances, I am aware of very ta-

lented papers having been refused acceptance, even when tendered gratuitously, by the same men who have paid enormous sums for very inferior articles by established favorites—the caterers for public amusement, are not here to blame, but the public themselves; who, sooner than submit to the exertion of forming their own judgment, will contentedly pass by an unopened mine of talent, to gather scanty returns from the overworked veins of an exhausted one.”

“You shall judge between us, Mr. Smithson;” said the host.

“You do me an honor of which I am not worthy;” replied Eustace, “I have ever been accustomed to consult the professional critics as oracles, without one misgiving as to their principles or motives: I have, at times, differed from them in opinion, but I have never had a suspicion of their honesty.”

Mr. Brockendon smiled: “Old men are apt to be opinionated, it is true; but, never-

theless I will leave my cause in your hands, until this day twelvemonths, when I will claim your decision; and you will be the better able to come to one fearlessly and honestly, young gentleman, as I have obtained for you, should you think proper to accept it, the sub-editorship which I mentioned to you when we met at Mr. Pearson's, with a salary of two hundred a-year—and if you can then lay your hand on your heart, and tell me, as a man of honor, that you have come unscathed from the furnace—”

“My life on it, he will!” exclaimed Norton, as the cheek of Eustace crimsoned with grateful emotion; “nor will he be the first who has done so; though he may be the only one capable of convincing *you* that a critic may be an honest man.”

“If a critic can indeed be one, he *will*—” said Mr. Brockendon, as he grasped the hand of Eustace, and shading the light from his eyes for a moment, rang for coffee.

## CHAPTER XVIII.

SURELY there is not in the world anything much more desolate than the appearance of an usually well-appointed establishment after a public night: house, mistress, and servants, there is a cold, comfortless, crabbed look about each and all, enough to scare good humour for a week. Faded flowers, chalked floors one mass of dirt and disorder, smoked lamps, spilt oil, rent hangings: the very demon of desolation might sit and grin over the ruins of a spent ball! In such a condition was the mansion of the Countess of Blacksley on the morning after her assembly, when her niece, with some difficulty, threaded

her way to the one unpolluted apartment, in which sat her ladyship with a cup of chocolate by her side, and the Morning Post in her hand.

"I was just wishing for you, Clara;" exclaimed the countess as she entered: "I've a great mind to send Barton to the editor of this vile paper, and refuse to pay for the notice of my night; such work as he has made of it! though I must say, my dear, that you are partly the cause."

"I, my dear aunt!"

"Yes;—here it is,—here it is;—I thought I should have choked;" and the countess raised her glass to her eye, and read aloud: "'Among the distinguished guests we remarked the Duke of Dumbarton, the Duke and Duchess of Anster, Earl and Countess Bentheway,' and so on;—but mark: 'Lord Frederic Masterton, and Mr. Joseph Nichols, *heir to Mr. Roberts*;'—horrible! shocking! as though he had bought a ticket, and got in



through the interest of one's butler or one's woman;—while, if I mistake not, Clara, you brought him."

"Certainly, madam; and I dare say you had more objectionable guests."

"Impossible, my dear; why he is a citizen."

"And a very rich one, aunt."

"A man who has no connexions."

"But a large property."

"Without anything to recommend him,"—

"But his money."

"Pshaw! I have no daughters to marry."

"But you have a niece."

Lady Blacksley let fall her eye-glass, and looked earnestly in the face of Lady Clara: "On my honor, my love, I had quite forgotten that; but are you serious?"

"Perfectly, my dear aunt; he has thirty thousand a-year."

"Ha! very true—you are decidedly right: you can do a great deal with thirty thousand a-year; or, if you should find him *too* bad, you might separate; and, you know, he can



be compelled to make you a handsome allowance in the event of such an occurrence."

"I have already thought of that."

"Very prudent and proper, my love; and I think you may do a great deal worse:—only I wish this horrid editor had not inserted his name so conspicuously in my list; it really does not look well—it has spoilt all."

"And such a name?"

"Ay, as you say, Clara, such a name; but, however, it signifies very little; money is the consideration, my dear; and really he is not so *very* bad."

Lady Clara smiled bitterly.

"And what says Lord Somerville? does he approve of this speculation?"

"Can you doubt it? Ashburnham is in debt, and likely to become more so; creditors are clamorous, and bankers sulky:—he may borrow money from his son-in-law, and repay him in civilities."

"Very true, my dear, and a very equitable

exchange; Mr. Nichols has more money than he wants, and my brother more politeness than he needs; and thus they may barter their advantages, and both be gainers."

"The man is tolerable enough considering, *that* I must admit," said Lady Clara; "all I fear is that papa may not find him quite so amenable as he expects; for I assure you that last night at supper he talked *en homme qui se connoit*, and sported a few opinions which somewhat startled my complacency."

"Mere manœuvring, depend on it;" said the countess, taking a sip at her chocolate; "trying how far he might go: take my advice, my dear, stand out for four horses, and—at least, three thousand a year, in the event of an arrangement—you understand me—a separate establishment."

"Yes—" replied the bride aspirant, teasing the countess's Italian greyhound with her glove, "but do you think we may venture to be so positive without risk of alarming him as to our

motives? You know, my dear aunt, the man *may* imagine that I am going to marry him from affection: those sort of people have such extraordinary opinions of themselves—and it would not do to undeceive him before-hand; if he be misled in the business by his own vanity, certainly I am not to blame—there is not a rational being in the world, who could not open his eyes to the truth, if he would hear it; and consequently it would be very unwise in me to undertake the office, when such a step would blight my own prospects.”

“Not to be thought of, decidedly,” conceded the countess; “it would be absolute madness: and if you do marry a plebeian, why, Clara, your family must support you; and you will not be the first who has enabled city gold to blend with high birth:—but the man has horrid relations, I hear.”

“Yes, I believe he has; but of course I shall not countenance them.”

“Most certainly not, the thing is not to be

thought of; no Mrs. Jenkins or Mr. Tomkins must be admitted beyond your servant's hall, or you are committed at once—there *are* inconveniences attendant on these plebeian alliances.”

“ Ay, truly; but on the other hand”—

“ Surely, surely, my love, on the other hand, the speculation is decidedly a very good one; and, as I said before, if you cannot reconcile yourself to it comfortably, you can separate on a handsome allowance; you will at all events have improved your circumstances.”

“ The world will perhaps be ill-natured”—

“ Never mind that; the aristocracy will be with you; and as to the other motes who fill up the chasms of the population, let them have their jest; they will have paid well for it—and now let us talk of my night. I hear the little Marchioness of Manyweathers was highly indignant that she had not a ticket.”

“ And how did it happen that she had not one, aunt?”

"Why, my dear, I knew that if she were invited, the marquis would not come; and I also knew that if the marquis declined, I should not have Lady Lucy Lightenton, which would have spoiled my ball; and consequently I contrived to forget the marchioness, and so insure the others."

"You are an excellent diplomatist."

"It is the easiest thing in the world; a quick eye to detect these little affairs, and a good memory to retain them, and you need never have that most heavy and heartless of all things, a *soirée mal assortie*. Do you think that the Duke of Washington would have spent three hours in my rooms, had he not known that Mrs. Abercrombie was to be there? or that Prince Sedaletzkie would have come from Brighton, unless it had been to meet the Duchess's pretty daughter?—I know that at all events they spent two hours in the Turkish tent; and I am really anxious to ascertain

whether there is any news of interest afloat this morning."

"Scandal, by all that is beautiful!"

"By no means: only a Gretna Green marriage; for the Duchess is far too proud ever to give her consent to the match."

"What, too proud to call her daughter 'your highness;' and to talk of her dear child, the Princess Sedaletzkie!"

"Even so: she knows enough of foreign titles to be aware that in Italy your boots may be cleaned by a count, and your household regulated by a prince."

"Titles of high mark, and little meaning;" said Lady Clara, arranging her Cachemire. "We do these things better in England.—But do you really think that Lady Anne cares at all for this man with the unpronounceable name?"

"I do indeed—Lady Anne is young and vain; tired of the tight-laced politics of her mother, and anxious to emancipate herself



from the trammels of maternal surveillance—the prince is handsome, accomplished, *fêté*, and assiduous; has fine, large, sleepy, black eyes; a most orthodox mustache, and a voice like the breathing of an Eolian harp.”

“Poetical, by the gods! my dear aunt—I expect I shall hear of your marrying again, if you talk thus.”

“Marrying again!” echoed the countess, with a look half languishing and half ludicrous.

“No, no; une fois suffit! a husband is an unmanageable animal—at least mine was—and then weeds are so shockingly unbecoming! as though it were not bad enough to have your income reduced by your husband’s death, without being expected to make a fright of yourself into the bargain.”

“But only for a year, you know, aunt.”

“A year! an eternity!—twelve long months of crimped muslin and bombazeen—I’m sure that to me the mere retrospect is frightful! I really do not think I could live through an-

other year's weeds. And then your face must be as solemn and proper as your cap and petticoat; even your very mouchoir must be managed decorously. Whatever you do, Clara, or whoever you marry, keep the man alive as long as you can, if you have any regard for your appearance."

"Eh bien, I am for the Park;" said Lady Clara laughing; "I must don my wedding-garment before I speculate on the close cap and weepers."

"If women could but be convinced by argument," persisted the countess, "they would be much happier by remaining single."

"Argument is a good thing, and a pleasant thing, my dear aunt; but you may rely on it, that there is nothing like experience." And so saying, Lady Clara kissed the countess between the eyes, settled the last fold of her Cachemire, and took her leave.

## CHAPTER XIX.

THERE is, perhaps, no decided species of vulgarity, so universally tolerated by all classes of society, as the debasing habit of "quizzing;" or one which more effectually lowers the tone of every circle into which it is admitted. Quizzing, treated as the ingenious Mrs. Opie has treated another vice common in the world, might be classed under twenty different heads; but we do not intend to trespass on the patience of our readers, by so elongated a definition of this debasing propensity

An erroneous idea has grown in some minds, that a quizzer must necessarily be

a wit—it is as fallacious an opinion, as that which supposes the writer of an epitaph to be of necessity a poet; wit is a pure and ethereal sparkle of the mind—it requires no shade of mind to constitute a quizzer; nor can such an one always lay claim even to the forbidding, unlovely talent of satire; for to be really satirical, there must be a tinge of talent—prostituted, it is true, but talent, however degraded, will still assert itself, although it may have lost the respectability which made it estimable. Who ever hearkened to the underbred utterer of this third-rate species of “good things,” the flippant retailer of mingled vulgarity and grossness, without shrinking in spirit from the breath of malignancy and cunning? for never was there a decided quizzer, who had not a hidden motive; and yet, perhaps, despite the utter vulgarity, the grossness, and the disgust of this polluting practice, there is decidedly nothing on earth which bears away

at one "fell swoop," more victims, and those even the well-informed, and the better dispositioned. Where is the man, however endowed with good sense, who may not be wiled in some degree from his purpose, by these professors of a black art? although he would shrink from making the acknowledgment, even to himself: and yet, let him ask his own heart, if, at the very moment, while he despised the speaker, he did not, nevertheless, shun the object of his (or her) malevolence, though he felt as he did so, that "the tongue of the evil-hearted is no slander,"—and, if he play not the traitor with his own conscience, he will admit the fact. This species of false shame, this temporary derilection at once from good breeding and good sense, is the triumph of the quizzer. Still greater is the power of a member of this debasing sect, when perverted pleasantry and aptitude, bordering at times on that slip-shod and uncertain wit which

too often passes current in the world for something better, lend a charm, a dangerous charm to malevolence; manner, that social coin, which is so frequently a counterfeit with the mere surface of the fine breeding which it apes, blinds us to the mischief over which it throws its spell; and we shrink not from the rose, though we know that the spider extracts a deadly poison from its blossom. In this age of false refinement, how many are there, who would more readily pardon a derilection from principle, than a deviation from politeness; who would rather tolerate vice than awkwardness? An underbred bow may do a man more injury with his mistress than an absolute failure in propriety; and an act of ill-arranged condescension may ruin a woman with her lover, when absolute levity would have passed by unheeded,—if the quizzer be at hand to comment on the one and the other; to throw out the dark shades of the picture, and to spread



the mantle of ridicule over the perception of good sense.

The quizzer is the paria of society; even the caste of the satirist is polluted by a collision with this outcast from the Bramah of good breeding—this dweller in the deserts of malevolence and ignorance. He is the scourge of social communion—the ministring imp of bitterness—the contempt of good men, and the world's scorn; the professor of a vice, which, born of flippancy and self-conceit, is nursed by malice, and is the fitting concomitant of low birth, low breeding, and low ideas.

Lady Clara had not been ten minutes in the Park, when she was joined by Nichols: he was well dressed, well mounted, and looking his very best; the Marquis of Dorset passed them with one of his peculiarly slouching bows, produced more by the motion of his shoulders, than by that of his head; the contrast was striking; Lady Clara felt that it was, for even aristocracy can look awkward. The day was lovely, and glancing down in

sunshine as it did, at a time when London was redolent of fog and fashion, it had drawn an immense concourse of beauty and idleness to the drive: there was a delightful difficulty in thredding through the high-bred mob of "gentlemen who live at ease," and ladies who were smiling like the morning: the well-managed bay of Mr. Nichols stepped gracefully on one side of Lady Clara's britscha, and the barb of Lionel Lovell was his vis-à-vis; a temporary stoppage took place, and a tall, upright, military-looking man reined up beside them.

"Ha! my dear Sir Samuel, I am delighted to see you in town again;" exclaimed Lady Clara, extending her delicately-gloved hand; "I have positively never met you since the ball at Haverington Castle; triste affaire, was it not? Mrs. Haverington does not understand that style of thing, it does not sit easy yet; I should have been ennuiée à mort before half the evening was over, had not Mr. Lovell

been at my side ; Mr. Lovell, Sir Samuel Shutington ; Mr. Nichols ;"—the gentlemen bowed ; " but I omit to enquire for your daughters—they are with you, I trust ; ha ! baronet, vous devez jouer le rôle de papa maintenant—last season ! but I tell no tales—"

" They are with me, Lady Clara ; and girl-like, fancying that London must be fairy-land ; they will soon however be undeceived."

" Cruel Sir Samuel ! why will you be so gloomy a prophet ? young, wealthy, and I doubt not, handsome, (or they would belie their parentage) it ought to be, and it will be, fairy-land for a time."

" And a very short one, I fear : I endeavour to enforce this unwelcome truth, but the cautions of an old man are like snow in sunshine ; to *live* in London they must be ever travelling on the high road to destruction, with dissipation for their charioteer, extravagance and folly for their lacqueys, and notoriety for their companion ; I do not wish such an existence

for my girls ; I cannot coldly make up my mind to see them old women at five-and-twenty, and gamesters at all ages."

" Oh fie ! what a sour limner have you become ;" said Lady Clara with an uneasy laugh ; " why the women will try you for a libel, and the men scout you for a cynic."

" I must learn to bear it all ;" was the reply, as the carriage moved slowly on. " Farewell for the present."

" Au revoir, baronet——Ciel ! to be baited by a bore :—is he not horrible, Lovell ?"

" Quite shocking !" responded Lovell, raising his large dark eyes from the silky mane of his barb ; " and the young ladies, are they as great bores as their father ?"

" Little well-born peasants ; they are two in number, reared at the old family seat, educated by a retired clergyman and his prim wife ; very good sort of notable, praiseworthy, humdrum, blue-stocking girls, who go into cottages where there is contagion, with cam-

phor-bags round their necks, to read prayers; teach dirty children to hem towels, and say 'Pity the sorrows of a poor old man;' get up at six o'clock in the morning to practise, and so forth."

"That was a fine girl on horseback who bowed to you; who is she?" asked Lovell raising his glass.

"That is Miss Marchmont, the Leicestershire heiress: I hear that her father would never have been returned for —— if she had not canvassed for him; she shook hands with all the green-grocers and tallow-chandlers in the borough, and like Lady Macbeth, cannot 'cleanse the little hand again.'—Ah! here comes Lord George Luttrell."

"How do, Lady Clara?" nodded the young scion of nobility, with eyes like an Albinese, and hair as curly and tangled as a poodle's back; "how do? looking en ange as usual, with that spirit of darkness Lionel Lovell beside you, tempering your brightness; how do,

Lovell?" he nodded again, and then with his glass fixed in his eye, he turned a long, vacant look on Nichols; "what crowds of people, ain't there? and some of them such quizzes! where can they come from? the purlieus I suppose."

"Yes; most of them; said Lovell quietly, one cannot even guess at their nature."

"The disgorging of the second-rate hotels"—simpered Lord George.

"Parties from the Angel at Peckham, and the Horns at Kennington:" said Lovell with emphasis.

The lordling fidgetted on his saddle: family reminiscences rendered the joke rather unpalatable. He turned the conversation; "Have been doing the agreeable to Miss Marchmont the heiress, Lady Clara; *comme elle traine!* talks about horrid electioneering, and canvassing, and hustings"——

"A bad style of person, I am aware:" replied the lady.



“ Take care what you say ;” interposed Lord George, endeavouring to look facetious ; “ for her worthy papa is covering her genealogical tree with guineas to prevent my governor from being too curious ; mademoiselle has a great inclination to be a countess.”

“ I should think that her bright eyes would secure a coronet :” observed Mr. Nichols.

“ Eh ?—what ? yes : bright eyes are very pretty things ;” said the lordling with a second stare ; “ but then, heaven knows who she is ! her father appeared of a sudden from Chincamalee, or Bangpore, or some other heathen country ; loaded the mail coach with rupees, and then bought an estate in Leicestershire ; but for aught I know he may have been a slave-driver, or a tobacconist.” Mr. Nichols became fidgetty in his turn.

“ Spare us, Lord George !” cried the lady with an affected shudder ; “ I shall never be able to look at the poor girl again without thinking of cigars.”

" Or flat noses ;" followed up his lordship.

" Or the estate in Leicestershire, and the rupees ;" said Lovell, who at once felt that the subject was an unfortunate one ; " and the deepest eyes, and the rosiest lips in England !"

" Voila Lionel qui extase !" drawled Lord George ; " he is a perfect refuge for the destitute ; did I not know to the contrary, I should think that he had been born behind a counter, and chastised in his youth with a yard-measure, but I am not so philanthropical, I prefer people who are somebody, and I dare say Miss Marchmont's money will buy her a coronet without my assistance ; she'll catch some noble gudgeon who has been ' cleaned out ' at Crockford's."

" Heaven forbid !" exclaimed Nichols instinctively ; " I trust she will see reason to decline so ill-omened a marriage."

" Reason !" laughed Lovell, " not a word about anything so anti-feminine. Women have no more business with reason than a savage

has with brandy, for they get so marvellously pleased with the taste of it, that they intoxicate themselves;—I would not marry a *reasonable* woman to be elected ‘lion’ for the season.”

“The ladies are at least not indebted to you for your opinion;” retorted Nichols.—

“Ah! yonder goes the Duchess.”

“Canaille!” sneered Lady Clara.

“A perfect picture,” said Lovell, “beautifully painted;—and there too goes his Grace.—Capital, by heavens! always talked of as the Duchess’s husband; so quiescent and complying, the very best of married men!”

“Hush! hush!” smiled Lady Clara, “complete scandal, I declare—though sure enough it is amusing,—gratitude should have made her more observant of his feelings; it was not every man who could have made her a duchess.”

“How do, Miss Ashley;” said Lord George as a barouche passed the party, in which sat a

lovely girl, worn down, as it seemed, by late hours and fashionable fatigues; yet looking beautiful despite her pale cheeks and heavy eyes. "I wonder that girl has not married, for she's really vastly pretty; and I should have thought could not have escaped for a whole season, besieged as she has constantly been since she came out."

"There you are sadly in error, my lord, as to a woman's peril," said Lady Clara; "this very crowd of admirers is a capital safeguard for the heart, (if you happen to have one,) for you have no time to ask it any questions, and you take it as a matter of course that it is perfectly unconcerned in the business; solitude, solitude is the peril; trust me, a waterfall, a shaded garden walk, and one dévoué, are more dangerous than a lighted ball room, a crowded boudoir, and a host of flatterers. I think it was Theodore Hook, who, in one of his pleasant volumes, warned all lovers who did not wish wholly to lose their hearts, to

beware of a green lane; rely on it, that was a touch of nature which he will never surpass."

"You speak selon le livre, Lady Clara;" said the lordling, "you have fairly beaten me out of the field; and you have done more, for you have accounted admirably for the heartlessness of our town belles; Lovell, we must start for the country when we are matrimonially inclined; bind our brows with roses, carry a pipe and tabor, and sit down near a cascade, till some blushing nymph comes to fill her pitcher."

"I decline the experiment;" said Lovell with a yawn; "I am not fond of rustic beauties, with their draperies tucked up, and their gown-skirts pulled through their pocket-holes,—ha! there goes the very man I have been looking for:—farewell, Lady Clara." And kissing the tips of his fingers, Lovell gave his barb the rein, and was soon lost in the crowd.

"And here comes a man *I* do *not* want to see; exclaimed Lord George, gathering up

his bridle, "the two things which I hold in abhorrence in this every-day world, are dirt and duns,—the one I always keep out of, and the other I always get away from—when I can! Au revoir, Lady Clara." And he hastened from them to bestow his tediousness elsewhere.

Lady Clara instantly became all sentiment and languor: lamented over the flippant nothingness of modern conversation, and spoke sotto voce:—ladies, there is never so much meaning attached to spoken trifles as when they are uttered beneath the breath; and so thought Mr. Nichols. Lady Clara certainly did not tell him that she preferred his society to that of the volatile Mr. Lovell, or of the noble Lord George Luttrell; but she looked as though she did, and she spoke so softly, so almost tenderly, that if not actually acknowledged, he nevertheless felt that the preference was implied; whereupon Mr. Nichols leant closer down upon the neck of his blood



bay, until his eyes were in a line with those of Lady Clara, and he drew his well-managed horse so close to the side of the britscha, that he could lay his hand within ten inches of the one he coveted to possess; and though he said little, yet he gave a meaning to that little very flattering to the self-love of the lady; and if he did not positively talk to her of that which was nearest his heart, he contrived to let her read his thoughts sufficiently to induce her at parting to put her hand in his, and to give him one of those smiles which by long practice she knew so well how to call up, and that seem to the eye of a lover, a coin of passion's own mintage, of which he himself has struck the die, and which was never intended for worldly circulation. One of these well-timed smiles did Lady Clara bestow on Mr. Joseph Nichols, while he held her hand, and slightly compressed unchidden the taper fingers—and so they parted!

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